



# CIVIC UPDATE

A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

## STRUCTURING AND MAINTAINING PARTNERSHIPS

NDI conducts citizen participation programs that activate and empower citizens, establish strong civic cultures and foster an appropriate balance of power between citizens and government. The Institute's approach to strengthening citizen participation generally involves partnering with local nongovernmental or community-based organizations as they undertake organized political actions - such as civic and voter education efforts, issue-advocacy campaigns, political-process monitoring initiatives and community organizing efforts. NDI's objective is to enhance the political activism of the partner groups with the expectation that they will tackle issues ranging from good governance to public safety to education. The results are an increase in participation, political space and government accountability.

The success of NDI's citizen participation programs, in large part, depend on how well partnerships are structured and nurtured over time. When supporting local civic groups, NDI strives to construct "intimate" developmental partnerships. This means that NDI clarifies roles, responsibilities and expectations with partners; responds to partners' needs and concerns; uses a mix of assistance methods that emphasize helping partners learn from their own experiences and from the experiences of their counterparts elsewhere; allows the partners to take ownership of decisions; and champions partners to other institutions. This reflects NDI's preferred partnership dynamic and helps to ensure that NDI's assistance is desired, appreciated and applied.

NDI has experience forming partnerships with hundreds of organizations spanning every region. These experiences have helped NDI shape a set of strategies and methodologies for structuring partnerships and delivering assistance. More and more often, assistance includes the provision of both technical and financial support. Learning to balance these different assistance methods and also learning to structure different types of partnerships accordingly have been the primary lessons gleaned from experience.

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This edition of the Citizen Participation team's *Civic Update* highlights how NDI structures its developmental partnerships – specifically focusing on the Institute's and partners' different expectations, roles and responsibilities. It lays out the mechanisms NDI staff use to determine partners' needs, the partnership structure, the purpose of the partnership and the most appropriate intervention strategy. But perhaps most importantly, this issue explores the variety of reasons why the Institute enters into a partnership and the implications for the delivery of assistance. For questions or further information on partnerships, please contact the Citizen Participation Team.

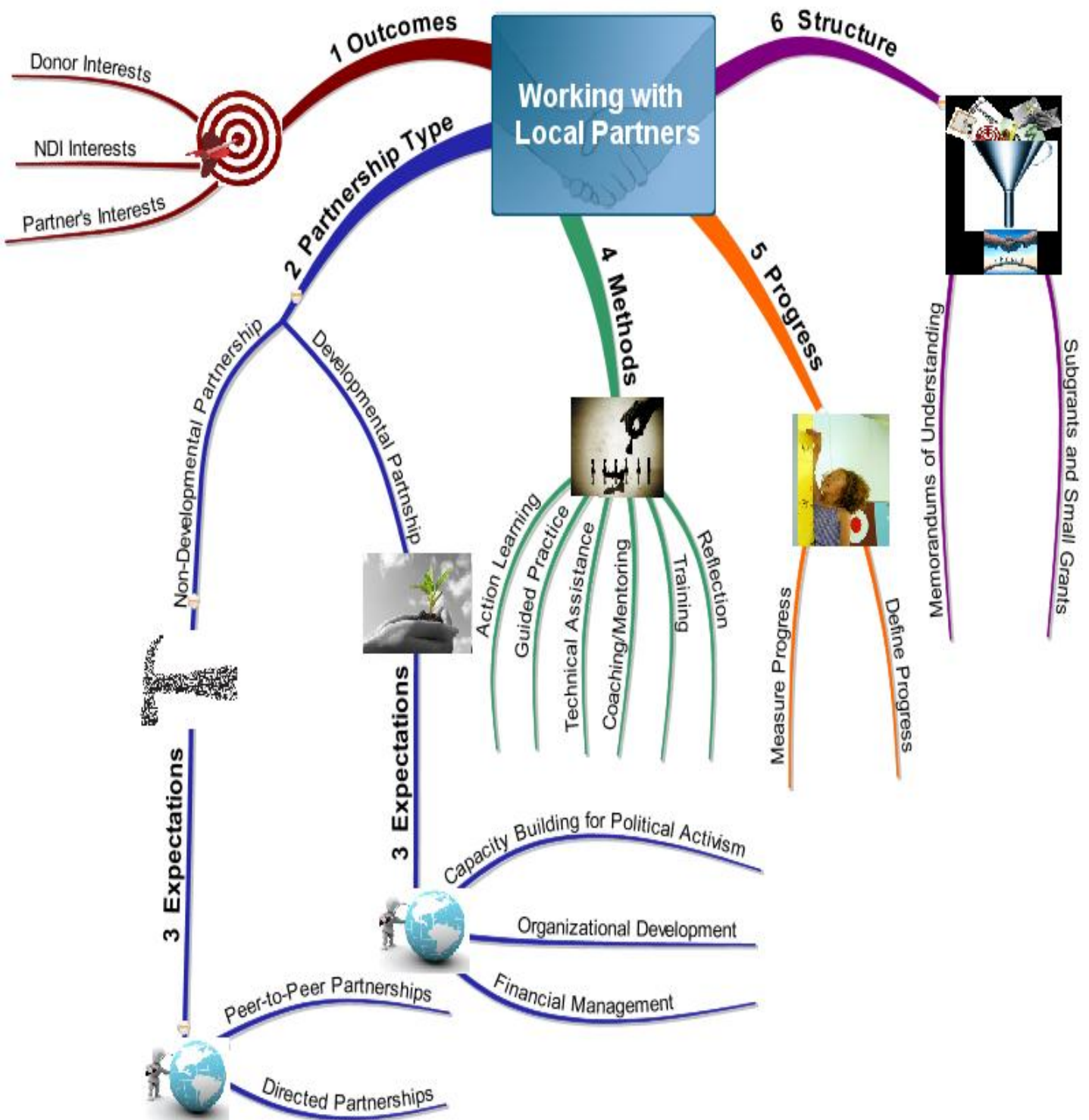
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# Working with Local Partners: Steps for Structuring a Partnership

The "Working with Local Partners" mindmap was developed as part of an internal NDI presentation by the Citizen Participation team's Senior Advisor, Koebel Price, and Senior Program Assistant, Lacey Kohlmoos. It lays out the process and issues to take into consideration when structuring a partnership. Below is visual representation of how to structure partnerships and opposite are brief explanations of each step in the structuring process. For more information please contact Koebel Price at [Kprice@ndi.org](mailto:Kprice@ndi.org) or Lacey Kohlmoos at [Lkohlmoos@ndi.org](mailto:Lkohlmoos@ndi.org)



1. Identify the desired *outcomes* of a partnership. These outcomes should be developed in terms of the donor's interests, NDI's interests and the potential partner's interests.
2. Determine the appropriate *type of partnership* - developmental or non-developmental –based on the desired outcomes and programmatic context. Some questions to ask at this stage in the process are as follows:
  - a. Is the partnership for carrying out a discreet activity?
  - b. Is the partner's capacity evident?
  - c. Is organizational development a program outcome?
  - d. Does the partner have adequate financial systems?
3. Identify NDI's and the partner's *expectations*. If it is a developmental partnership, the assistance should be structured to address a combination of capacity building for political action, organizational development and financial management capacity building.
  - a. *Capacity building for political activism* focuses on developing the partner's ability to implement activities.
  - b. *Organizational development* focuses on building the partner's internal systems and structures so that it can function independently of NDI assistance.
  - c. *Financial management capacity building* focuses on developing the partner's financial systems and structures so that it can manage its finances.If it is an instrumental partnership, decide whether it should be directed or peer-to-peer.
  - a. *Directed instrumental partnerships* are when NDI is solely responsible for the program and directs the work of the partner. Accountability flows from the partner to NDI.
  - b. *Peer-to-peer instrumental partnerships* are when the partner independently carries out one or more of NDI's program objectives or when partners share design and decision-making responsibilities. In these cases, accountability flows in both directions between NDI and its partners.
4. Determine the appropriate *methods* for delivering assistance to the partner based on the expectations of the partnership.
  - a. Technical assistance is when NDI provides partners with very specific knowledge and skills to develop their technical expertise.
  - b. Training is when NDI transfers knowledge and skills to partners that they are expected to later apply within the context of their program activities.
  - c. Coaching/mentoring is when NDI provides "real time" assistance and feedback to partners. Coaching tends to be more immediate and solution-oriented, while mentoring is more removed and process-oriented.
  - d. Action learning is when partners learn how to design and implement an action as they go through the process of designing and implementing that action.
  - e. Guided practice is a type of action learning where NDI guides its partners through the action learning process.
  - f. Reflection is when NDI and its partners periodically reflect back on the assistance and the events that have unfolded over the course of the partnership.
5. Determine how the partner's *progress* over the course of the partnership will be defined and how that progress will be measured. This makes it easier for NDI to identify the type of assistance that the partner needs as it evolves and also makes it easier to monitor and evaluate the partnership and program.
6. Identify the mechanism through which the partnership will be formally structured.
  - a. Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) are created by NDI and its partners at the beginning of program or partnership to clarify and confirm roles, responsibilities and expectations. It is not a financial agreement.
  - b. Small grants and subgrants are financial agreements. Subgrants are for sums of \$10,000 or more, administered from the headquarters office in Washington, DC and are geared towards larger organizations with adequate financial management systems. Small grants are for sums of less than \$10,000 with fewer restrictions attached, administered in the field and geared towards smaller organizations that wouldn't be able to manage larger funding amounts.

### Structuring Partnerships: Taking Context into Consideration

NDI has formed thousands of partnerships with organizations from over 100 countries, and while the core strategies and methodologies for structuring partnerships may remain constant, the purposes and expectations for these partnerships often change according to the country and program context. Working with a CSO with a high organizational capacity in an open political environment presents different challenges and opportunities than working with a CSO with low organizational capacity in a closed political environment. There are many factors that can affect the outcomes of a partnership – the amount of political space available in which to operate, partners' organizational or organizing capacity, available funding and the length of a programmatic timeframe. Therefore, the structure and expectations for a partnership must be determined not only by what both partners want to achieve, but also by what is possible to achieve in the given context.

## Glossary of Terms

**Capacity Building for Political Activism:** The extent to which an organization has the skills, values, relationships and technologies that would allow it to coordinate and manage activities or events that serve its core mission. Program-focused capacity building activities can address the following issue areas: issue identification, volunteer recruitment, messaging and mobilization, campaign/program planning, materials development, meeting management, power/political analysis, community mapping and visioning.

**Developmental Partnerships:** A relationship with an organization that is structured for the explicit purpose of building the group's capacity and effectiveness as it pursues its self-defined organizational objectives. Success is measured by higher levels of performance, professionalism and independence from NDI technical support on the part of the local group.

**Financial Management Capacity:** A component of overall organizational capacity that focuses on the group's ability to manage and report on funds appropriately and accurately.

**Memorandums of Understanding (MoU):** A formal agreement between NDI and its partners created at the beginning of a program or partnership that clarifies and confirms roles, obligations and expectations.

**Non-Developmental Partnerships:** A relationship with an organization that is structured around implementing NDI's program activities. No organizational development or technical assistance is included in an instrumental partnership, because NDI believes that the partner already has the sufficient skill level needed to carry out the programmatic responsibilities.

**Organizational Capacity:** The ability of a partner to effectively build an organization with the internal systems, structures, policies and processes that would allow it to serve its core mission. Organizational capacity-building activities can address the following issue areas: management, internal communications, governance, strategic planning, fundraising, networking, research, human resources and organizing.

**Small Grants:** The financial assistance provided to local partner organizations under \$10,000. They are generally administered in the field and carry fewer restrictions on the types of CSOs that receive them.

**Subgrants:** The financial mechanism used for agreements with CSOs for \$10,000 and above. Subgrants must be administered through the Subgrants Unit in Washington, D.C.

## Structuring Partnerships: The New Subgrants Risk Assessment Form

In early 2009, NDI convened an internal Subgrant Working Group to address a growing problem with subgrantees whose lack of financial management capacity only became known after the partnership and program activities were already underway. The working group examined how NDI could limit its exposure to risk and also leverage the greatest programmatic value from subgrants. The result of the initiative was a set of recommendations and a new subgrant risk assessment form released to the rest of the Institute in late 2009 called "The Form to Evaluate Levels of Risk and Capacity Surrounding Developmental Subgrants." The working group's recommendations outlined the different types of partnerships that can be formed through a subgrant, as well as how and when these partnerships should be structured and maintained.

The new risk assessment form complements an existing form focused exclusively on a partner's capacity to handle finances, keep accounts and use financial software. In accordance with the working group's recommendations, NDI staff are now encouraged to fill out the new risk assessment form before awarding any developmental subgrant worth more than US\$100,000. The new risk assessment form developed by the Subgrant Working Group allows NDI staff to better capture the political and security risks associated with awarding a subgrant, as well as the organizational capacity of potential partners.

The revamped subgrant process, laid out by the working group and endorsed by the executive office, requires NDI staff to work collaboratively when defining the

overall purpose of a subgrant, analyzing a potential partner's financial and programmatic capacities, and structuring a partnership that delivers appropriate, concerted and coherent assistance to a subgrantee. The new form is a key component in this process. By posing a series of 25 questions, the form enables NDI staff to identify and analyze needs and risks and determine the most appropriate ways to support the partner and ensure effective financial oversight.

Although the risk assessment form is still new, NDI staff have already begun using it as a tool for structuring partnerships and defining assistance strategies and methods. Staff have found the form particularly useful because the focus on partners' organizational capacity helped them identify the areas where NDI should concentrate its *technical* assistance. They also felt that, in order to get maximum utilization out of the form, it should be used as the basis for dialogue and a baseline assessment of partners. As a result, it is anticipated that subgrants would be used more thoughtfully and strategically to build up partner organizations. It is also recommended that the form remain a part of the conversation between regional program staff, the Citizen Participation team and the Subgrants team throughout the subgrant partnership. When completed collaboratively by NDI staff sufficiently familiar with the potential partner and the factors that can affect a partnership, "The Form to Evaluate Levels of Risk and Capacity Surrounding Developmental Subgrants" can be a powerful tool for designing and managing developmental partnerships. ■

"The Subgrant Working Group Recommendations" and "The Form to Evaluate Levels of Risk and Capacity Surrounding Developmental Subgrants" are both available on the Citizen Participation Portal site at:

<http://portal2009.ndi.org/web/citizen-participation/structuring-partnerships1>

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The Citizen Participation Team has also produced other materials addressing partnerships:

"Creating Developmental Partnerships with Local Organizations and Using Subawards to Promote Organizational Development" was developed in 2006 based on research conducted on NDI's partnerships in Romania. You can find the document on the portal at: [http://portal2009.ndi.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?p\\_l\\_id=263273&folderId=103153&name=DLFE-5107.pdf](http://portal2009.ndi.org/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=263273&folderId=103153&name=DLFE-5107.pdf)

The 2004 report entitled "Review of Partnership Relationships with GONG and *Transparencia*" shows how the organization's leadership and NDI's approach to providing assistance were critical to the overall success achieved by the Croatian group GONG and the Peruvian group *Transparencia*. You can find the report on the portal at: [http://portal2009.ndi.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?p\\_l\\_id=263273&folderId=103152&name=DLFE-6415.pdf](http://portal2009.ndi.org/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=263273&folderId=103152&name=DLFE-6415.pdf)



## Partnership in Georgia: A Gradual Shift

Successful partnerships evolve over time as capacities and development needs change. In 1995, NDI began assisting a group of Georgian citizen activists who built the International Society for Free Elections and Democracy (ISFED). ISFED was the first domestic election monitoring organization in Georgia and has monitored every election since that time. NDI's partnership with ISFED has spanned 15 years and undergone a series of transformations. At the same time, NDI's knowledge about partnerships and delivering assistance has also changed.

From the start, ISFED wanted to develop into a more robust election monitoring organization with national and regional coverage, as well as expand its program activities into other areas of civic engagement. It also wanted to strengthen its organizational capacity to carry out programs independently and looked to NDI for the necessary assistance to achieve those goals. To meet ISFED's needs, NDI initially formed a partnership structured around a subgrant agreement. The partnership was structured to provide ISFED with both the technical and financial assistance it would need to accomplish its organizational goals. According to a subgrant agreement outlining both organizations' financial and programmatic roles and responsibilities, ISFED would participate in consultations to increase its organizational capacity, deepen its knowledge, and strengthen its ability to conduct program activities. NDI would provide technical and financial assistance to support ISFED's organizational development and program activities.

NDI's technical assistance primarily involved conducting targeted trainings to enhance ISFED's organizational development and programming capacity. Organizational development topics included report writing, volunteer recruitment and management, internal and external communication, and financial management. Technical trainings were aimed at increasing ISFED's capacity for delivering programming related to election monitoring, parallel vote tabulation (PVT), voter education, public opinion research, and effectively engaging citizens and elected officials. Through this assistance, ISFED was able to expand its activities beyond domestic election monitoring to include enhancing citizen interaction with members of parliament, advocating for elective and legislative reforms and increasing public participation in local government decision-making processes.

In 2004, internal and external factors prompted a change in ISFED's leadership and organizational structure, which then led to a shift in the structure of its partnership with NDI. One of the factors that led to ISFED's internal shift was the perception of some of its staff that the organization was overly reliant on NDI for programmatic support. Both organizations realized that long-term support from NDI might negatively impact ISFED's credibility as an independent organization in Georgia. Thus, ISFED and NDI decided to shift the nature of the relationship so that there was an expectation that assistance would change and decrease accordingly over time. Both organizations realized that ISFED was not ready to completely cut off ties from NDI, and therefore decided to make the shift gradual to ensure that ISFED had enough staff and organizational capacity to succeed on its own.

In an effort to better target the remainder of its developmental support to ISFED, NDI sent a consultant to Georgia in 2005 to conduct an internal needs assessment with the central and regional office staff. Through the new partnership structure, NDI would take more of an advisory role and provide ISFED subgrants for discrete program activities. Likewise, NDI would conduct trainings and consultations to improve ISFED's organizational development. In 2008, ISFED entered a new phase in its development - overhauling its board of directors and changing its hiring system into merit-based hiring - which has greatly improved its staff capacity and increased transparency within the organization in the last two years.



ISFED roundtable meeting

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## Partnership in Georgia: A Gradual Shift Continued

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Currently, NDI is helping ISFED develop more sophisticated organizational capacities related to report writing and donor communications, communication through the media, multi-donor financial management, and staff development and human resources management. In the coming months, and with NDI's technical and financial support, ISFED will travel to Croatia for a study trip to visit NDI's long-standing partner in Croatia, *Građani Organizirano Nadgledaju Glasovanje* (GONG). This study tour will provide ISFED an opportunity to learn from a peer how to build a national network of CSOs - something ISFED is eager to do in Georgia. As the developmental partnership with NDI slowly transitions to a partnership of like-minded organizations working side-by-side as equals, all of

NDI's assistance should put ISFED in a better position to thrive as an independent organization.

Throughout the 15-year relationship, NDI has modified its partnership with ISFED in order to try to ensure that assistance has been targeted to fit ISFED's needs. The changes also reflected NDI's growing knowledge of how to structure partnerships and deliver assistance. In the earlier years of the partnership, NDI provided a significant level of support to ISFED because internal organizational and technical capacity was relatively low. As ISFED grew as an organization and was able to conduct many activities independently of NDI technical support, NDI's approach took the form of strategic consultations and targeted training and emphasized the importance of ISFED learning from its experiences and making adjustments as a matter of course. ■

## The NDI-CDT Partnership: CDT Takes Ownership

In 2008 and 2009, NDI's long-time partner in Montenegro, the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT), experienced a period of change that led both the Institute and CDT to reflect on the structure of the partnership. From 2001-2009, NDI provided CDT with financial and technical assistance to conduct election monitoring and parliamentary internship programs. Although the partnership was developmental, most of NDI's assistance was targeted at building CDT's capacity to carry out political actions. During this period of collaboration, neither partner felt it necessary to prioritize CDT's internal organizational development. This changed in 2008, however, after NDI began making plans to close its Montenegro office. At this time, NDI and CDT agreed to emphasize CDT's sustainability as a voice for democratic development. Both partners realized that CDT would have to strengthen its internal organizational capacities in order to sustain itself without the Institute's assistance.

realized that it needed to more clearly define roles and responsibilities for the Center's staff and leaders, create



CDT Code of Conduct signing

In 2009, a change in CDT's leadership led it to take greater ownership of its own development – a shift that NDI supported through assistance focused primarily on organizational capacity-building. When CDT and NDI repositioned their priority from program-focused capacity building to organizational development, the partnership changed. No longer providing financial support, NDI headquarters and field staff worked with CDT to conduct internal needs assessments, identify resources and key weaknesses, and devise a time-structured work plan. As a result of these organizational assessments, CDT

a detailed action plan to achieve financial sustainability, define its goals for future programming and develop a strategic plan for positioning the organization within civil society. After CDT identified its needs, the Citizen Participation team Senior Advisor Koebel Price helped the organization craft a developmental plan to address these needs. The Institute also hired an external consultant who held monthly meetings and workshops with CDT to help divide the overall plan into shorter, time oriented goals.

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

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**Thank You!**

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**The NDI-CDT Partnership: CDT Takes Ownership Continued**

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The change in CDT's leadership also gave it a dynamic push from within to take more ownership of its organizational development. CDT staff were enthusiastic about strengthening their organization, and tackled the developmental tasks laid out in their strategic plans to quickly achieve concrete results—a consolidated governance and leadership structure, stronger organizational capacity, a strong media presence and the establishment of a private company to serve as a future source of income. NDI found that conducting internal assessments and developing strategic plans early in the organizational development process helped the Institute deliver its assistance more effectively, and also helped CDT better absorb that assistance.

Among other lessons, NDI's successful partnership with CDT demonstrates that developmental assistance is most effective when the partner takes ownership of the process and is guided through a process of crafting effective developmental plans with clear, time oriented goals, and a clear division of responsibility. ■

**The Citizen Participation Team Portal Site**

For more information on NDI's approach to partnerships, selecting partners, and structuring and maintaining partnerships, please visit the Citizen Participation Team Portal site at:

<http://portal2009.ndi.org/web/citizen-participation/partnership-development1>

(Hint: Sign into the portal site before clicking on the link)

