FACTSHEET: PROMOTING MORE POLICY-FOCUSED PARTIES THROUGH CIVIC ORGANIZING

In democratic systems, political parties should provide opportunities for citizens to oversee or influence their government. In many places, however, political parties are too weak, too personality-driven, too constrained by oppressive governments or too out of touch to play this critical role in democratic governance. Developing more vibrant and inclusive democracies requires citizen-centered approaches that help people increase their engagement with and influence over political parties. While the theoretical foundations for this approach appear strong, analysis of lessons learned from practical experiences are limited.

Promoting More Policy-Focused Parties Through Civic Organizing: A Guidance Note

Under the Global Elections and Political Transitions Leader with Associates grant, technical leadership activities help enhance USAID and partner capacities to conduct elections and political transition programming worldwide. As part of its technical leadership initiatives, the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) recently examined the conditions under which civic organizing – such as anti-vote buying campaigns, citizen policy platforms, and other forms of advocacy – can help promote more policy-focused, citizen-centered political parties.

As part of the initiative, CEPPS:
- Conducted a literature review;
- Held a peer review roundtable discussion with democracy and governance practitioners, academics and transparency/accountability professionals;
- Conducted desk research (Belarus, Slovakia) and field research (Liberia, Uganda) to identify lessons learned from four programs; and
- Developed a guidance note based on the literature review and case studies.

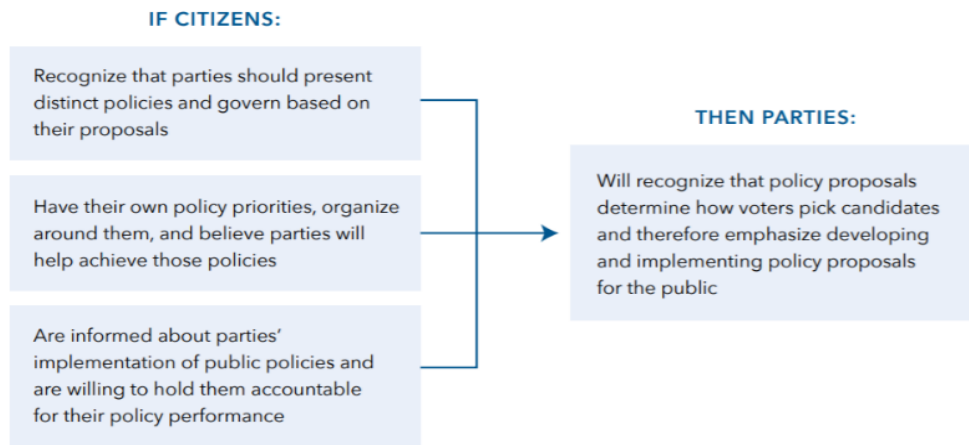Highlights of the guidance note include the following.

☑ A theory of change for using civic organizing to promote more policy-focused parties.

If citizens:
- recognize that parties should offer differentiated policies and govern based on those policy proposals, and are willing and able to cast their votes based on that understanding;
- have policy priorities and preferences, organize around them, and see parties as viable means for achieving those policy preferences; and
- are willing and able to hold political parties and elected officials accountable for their policy performance;

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- then parties will place increased emphasis on developing and implementing policy proposals for the public good.

IF CITIZENS:

Recognize that parties should present distinct policies and govern based on their proposals

Have their own policy priorities, organize around them, and believe parties will help achieve those policies

Are informed about parties' implementation of public policies and are willing to hold them accountable for their policy performance

THEN PARTIES:

Will recognize that policy proposals determine how voters pick candidates and therefore emphasize developing and implementing policy proposals for the public

☑ **A framework for considering different contextual factors that could have implications for programming: political space; institutional and structural factors; political party capacities and interests; and civil society dynamics.**

For each set of factors, the guidance note outlines a series of issues to consider and the potential implications for programming.

☑ **Four recommendations for strengthening future program design and implementation:**

Political Space	Political Party Capacities & Interests
Program Risks & Opportunities	
Civil Society Capacities & Interests	Institutional & Structural Factors

Consider different contextual factors and their potential implications for programming.

Set realistic expectations for progress toward more policy-focused political parties.

Plan for medium- to long-term efforts that incorporate a variety of interventions, use multiple entry points in the political cycle and that can be sustained over time.

Consider how entrenched social norms may influence power relations and party responsiveness to demands from marginalized groups. When mobilizing people around a shared identity such as gender, carefully weigh how intersecting identities -- gender, age, religion, or race, for instance -- may affect prospects for uniting people around a single, shared, identity maker.

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