

A decorative floral pattern in a lighter shade of blue, featuring various flowers, leaves, and swirling vines, positioned in the upper right quadrant of the cover.

Moving Closer to Citizens

A Manual on Outreach
for Elected Representatives in Morocco



Moving Closer to Citizens

A Manual on Outreach
for Elected Representatives in Morocco

Outreach is a central part of the role of elected officials. Engaging with citizens to learn about their concerns and priorities is necessary for elected leaders to represent public interests in decision-making processes. Elected leaders who are visible, responsive and accountable to citizens outside of election campaign periods create public trust in themselves and political institutions. This trust is crucial for effective and sustainable democracy.

This manual provides practical guidance on outreach for local and national elected representatives in the Moroccan context. The content was largely shaped by 14 members of parliament (MPs) who participated in a two-year pilot program implemented by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), through which they managed non-partisan constituency outreach offices in the communities they represent. It also draws on lessons learned by local councilors whom NDI has assisted in better reaching out to citizens to learn about their needs.

During the constituency outreach program, NDI assisted 14 MPs in applying constituent outreach techniques to directly engage with citizens and advocate on their behalf. Through one-on-one office meetings, public events and door-to-door canvassing, the MPs became more closely tied to listening and responding to citizens' needs. Each MP was supported by an NDI trained Constituency Office Assistant, who was responsible for receiving constituents in the local office, managing casework, and liaising with the MP when she or he was away from the office and in parliament. The guidance presented in this resource is based on lessons learned from these MPs and their assistants, as well as the experience of local councilors in Morocco. These dedicated politicians have made a commitment to better connect with citizens in their communities. Finally, this guide also presents examples of adaptable outreach best practices implemented by parliamentary institutions and elected officials in other countries.

NDI has supported local and national officials, political parties and civil society organizations in more than 70 countries for over 30 years in developing and adapting techniques to improve relationships between citizens and elected representatives. While most of the outreach techniques included in this guide are useful for both local and national elected officials, some techniques are more appropriate for MPs or local councilors, respectively. Although the manual differentiates between MPs and local councilors when describing outreach approaches in most cases, it is always important to consider the local context and adapt as necessary when implementing these techniques.

The manual is broken into six main sections, some with multiple sub-sections: An introduction to constituent outreach; analysis on perceptions of outreach practices in Morocco; further description of NDI's assistance on outreach for local and national elected officials; guidance on outreach activities adapted to the Moroccan context; tips for managing a constituency office and casework; and main conclusions and takeaways on outreach in Morocco.

Table of Contents

Preface	3
Acknowledgements	6
I. Introduction	7
What is Constituent Outreach?	7
Why is Constituent Outreach Important?	7
Common Challenges to Outreach	8
II. Citizen Perceptions of Outreach Efforts in Morocco	10
NDI Focus Group Research on Citizen Perceptions of Outreach by Elected Officials	10
Regionalization and the 2015 Local and Regional Elections	11
III. NDI Support for Local-level Outreach	12
MP Constituency Outreach Program	12
Outreach Assistance for Local Councilors	13
IV. Expanding Local Outreach: Guidance for Outreach in Morocco	14
Public Forums and Gatherings	14
Tips for Organizing Public Forums and Gatherings	14
Going Out into the Community	16
Tips for Community Outreach	16
Cooperating with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)	17
Leveraging Social Media and other Online Tools	17
Ensuring Inclusive Local Engagement	18
• Tips for Engaging Women	19
• Tips for Engaging Youth	19
V. Serving Constituents through Local Offices	21
Maintaining a Non-partisan Perception	23
Office Brochure	24
The Role of Office Assistants	25
Listening and Responding to Citizens' Problems	26
• Casework overview	26
<i>Office Hours/Meeting Constituents</i>	26
<i>Communication with Government Agencies</i>	27
<i>Tips on Communicating with Government</i>	27
<i>Tracking Casework</i>	28
VI. Conclusions on Outreach in Morocco	29

Acknowledgements

This manual was prepared by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) with funding from the British Embassy in Rabat and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Portions of this manual were adapted from NDI's *Constituent Relations Manual: A Guide to Best Practices*.¹ Michael Sweigart, NDI Senior Program Assistant, compiled and drafted the main text of this document. Othmane Haddy, NDI/Morocco Program Coordinator, and Randa Farhat, NDI Senior Program Officer, also made contributions to the manual. It was edited by Jane Hurtig, NDI Resident Country Director in Morocco, and Lila Jaafar, NDI Senior Program Manager.

NDI would like to thank the Moroccan MPs and local councilors who contributed to this manual. These leaders, who have been active participants in NDI programs, have committed to moving closer to their constituents in order to learn about and better represent their interests in local and national decision-making processes. The MPs who participated in NDI's Constituency Outreach Program and contributed to this manual include: Arafat Ahmoun, Fatiha Bakkali, Lahcen Benouari, Mina Bouhdoud, Driss Chtibi, Fouzia Elbayed, Abdelhak Ennaji, Naima Farah, Fouad Hajir, Milouda Hazeb, Abdelfatah Kamal, Oum El Banine Lahlou, Fatima Mazzi, and Adil Tchikito. The local councilors who have participated in NDI's political party strengthening program and contributed to this manual include Badia Bennani and Nouhad Safi.

NDI would also like to thank the MP Assistants who provided important daily support for MPs' office operations and helped compile content for this manual. These individuals include: Mounir Aznail, Adil Bazi, Soumia Bellari, Khadija Boutzenarine, Naima Bouyanssane, Mohamed Chaali, Ghizlane Kerrami, Jamal Laktib, Fatiha Mehdaoui, Moustafa Moujoud, Najaoua El Moussaid, Mohamed Solhi, and Youssef Zine.

¹ <https://www.ndi.org/node/14934>

I. Introduction

› What is Constituent Outreach?

The need to conduct constituent outreach is based on the principle of public service. Constituents are citizens who reside in a district that is represented by an elected official. It is a crucial part of the duties of elected leaders, at the local and national levels, to serve all citizens in their constituencies in a non-partisan manner by representing their interests in the legislative process. Citizens expect to have contact with their elected representative and recognize them as someone who can solve their problems and help him/her navigate the complex government bureaucracy. Where citizens are unaware of the role of elected representatives, it is important for officials to inform them of their responsibility to be accountable to the public. The practice of constituent relations involves communicating with constituents, learning about their concerns and, as possible and where appropriate, helping to solve their problems. It encompasses a broad range of activities that can be adapted to fit an elected representative's budget, time and level of experience. Everything from conducting public forums and issuing newsletters, to visiting with a constituent during a trip to the local market or café, to intervening on behalf of a constituent before a local government agency all represent effective constituent relations strategy. The specific methods an elected leader can use depend on a variety of factors described later in this section, but all legislators can engage constituents on some level.

› Why is Constituent Outreach Important?

Constituent relations is often one of the most challenging aspects of an elected official's job, but it is important for many reasons and can provide benefits to constituents, leaders, and society as a whole.

First, legislators who actively engage their constituents help to create a link between citizens and their government. By getting involved in local problems, officials can demonstrate the government's ability to address real issues in people's lives and provide tangible benefits to communities they represent. By listening to public concerns and then conveying those concerns in the legislature or to colleagues within local and national government, legislators are better equipped to design or amend policies that respond to real human needs. Political parties can use the information collected through active engagement with constituents to ensure that their platforms resonate with constituents and their policies reflect relevant concerns.

Second, active engagement in one's constituency gives a more human face to the legislator and the legislature. Although an elected representative cannot solve all of his or her constituents' problems, helping with some and at least trying with others can build public trust in the legislator and the legislature. Direct contact between legislators and citizens can build public trust in the legislator and the legislature. Citizens may better understand who their legislators are, what their roles are, how they make difficult decisions and how they can help (as well as how they cannot help). Citizens who have direct contact with an elected representative are also more likely to identify his or her party as an institution they trust. This trust in officials is crucial for effective democracy.

Third, effective constituent relations work can help mobilize citizen participation in public affairs. When an elected representative works with local officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and ordinary citizens to solve local problems, he or she empowers them to improve their lives and their communities. By widening the circle of citizens who involve themselves in public policies and public decisions, the representative fights apathy and helps to make democracy work through practical problem-solving. Parties and elected representatives who establish strong ties with constituents also develop a base of loyal political supporters and help to mobilize volunteers.

› Common Challenges to Outreach

Every elected representative faces challenges in conducting outreach. NDI's experience in Morocco and elsewhere shows that many officials have developed strategies to successfully manage many of these challenges. It is helpful for elected representatives to be aware of the challenges they will likely face, so they can be prepared with potential responses and solutions. Three of the most common challenges include the following:

- **Limited Access to Resources:** Elected leaders have limited time, financial and staff resources for conducting constituent relations. It is usually ideal to have a local office to allow for a permanent presence in the community, staff to assist in liaising with citizens, and funds for organizing outreach activities. All of these things can be expensive. Nonetheless, developing an active profile in the constituency does not necessarily require a lot of money or staff. Elected officials can often take advantage of the support of their political parties, local public administration and NGOs to communicate with citizens in a cost-effective manner. In many countries where elected leaders lack funds to hire staff, they are able to recruit volunteers to help.

In some countries, leaders can convince their party leaders or legislative leadership to allocate funds to conduct some constituent outreach. Although the Moroccan parliament does not currently offer funding for constituency offices, the MPs that participated in NDI's constituency outreach program have paved the way for their peers to improve their outreach to constituents. MPs' experience in this two-year program have led to many valuable lessons learned and techniques on effective outreach in the Moroccan context. Many of these strategies are low cost, including using free online programs to manage constituent cases, conducting meetings in their constituency offices or free places like public markets and cafes, and drawing on community networks to identify other free venues to convene public gatherings to engage with citizens. Many of these outreach activities do not require a constituency office. These techniques are described further in this manual.

- **Lack of Incentives to Conduct Constituent Relations:** In countries whose electoral systems encourage an emphasis on party profile, as opposed to individual identity, legislators may feel little urgency to interact with citizens. But parties benefit when legislators interact with citizens and are responsive to their concerns. In fact, constituent service provides elected representatives with a chance to involve the party in addressing local needs and problems. Thus, an active elected official can strengthen the party by keeping in touch with citizens. This may in turn help to enhance the leader's profile within the party. And elected officials can facilitate party branch leader involvement

in the community. ***Although outreach by elected officials can be beneficial for political parties, it is crucial that officials' services remain nonpartisan and equally available to all citizens.***

- **Unrealistic Citizen Expectations:** Many representatives have expressed frustration that constituents have unrealistic expectations or misperceptions about what elected leaders do. Citizens also often blur the lines between the roles of local elected leaders and national elected legislators. They often ask for assistance that falls outside an elected representative's responsibilities (e.g., request for employment or direct financial assistance). In most countries, citizens have a limited understanding of the constraints placed on elected officials – relating to limited budget resources, competing priorities, or to constraints on policy-making. While this perception gap is hard to close, the best way for elected leaders to combat these misperceptions is to increase outreach to citizens to educate them on their actual roles, responsibilities and constraints. This guide describes efforts by Moroccan elected leaders to address this challenge, mostly involving educating citizens about the role and real abilities of elected officials.

Educating Citizens on the Role of Parliament: British Parliamentary Education Service

Many legislatures around the world have offices dedicated to informing citizens about the role of MPs and services provided by the legislature. Such offices are a good way to combat public misperceptions about what an elected representative can accomplish and about the process it takes for elected representative to address citizens' problems.

The British Parliamentary Education Service, for example, offers extensive resources for informing the public on the role of MPs and the services offered by the Parliament. The Education Service website² makes online video tutorials available to citizens, and features downloadable training materials that can be used by MPs, teachers and others to educate the public on the legislative process. The parliament also offers training courses on political processes for school teachers who teach policy-related subjects. In addition, it is possible to organize a school visit to Parliament for a tour and information sessions on parliamentary services. Schools that cannot transport its students to Parliament can arrange for a representative from the Education Service to visit the school to speak to students about the role of parliament, the legislative process, and the importance of citizen participation in governance.

² <http://www.parliament.uk/education/teaching-resources-lesson-plans/>

II. Citizen Perceptions of Outreach Efforts in Morocco

› NDI Focus Group Research on Citizen Perceptions of Outreach by Elected Officials

Real information on citizen perceptions of elected representatives can help demonstrate the importance of citizen outreach. To gather a sample of this information, NDI conducted focus group research in two regions of Morocco³ in fall 2013 to measure citizens' perceptions of the outreach efforts of MPs and the roles and responsibilities of elected representatives at the local and national levels. The goal of the research was to inform the design of NDI's above-described constituency outreach initiative.

Focus groups are open-ended group interviews directed by a moderator and following a pre-set guideline. The purpose of focus group research is to understand the attitudes, opinions and experiences of participants who are recruited for the exercise. They reveal not just what people think, but also why they think that way, how they formulate opinions, and how strongly these opinions are held. They also help researchers to better understand the various nuances in citizens' opinions – hesitation, enthusiasm, anger, or uncertainty. By listening directly to the voices of participants, focus groups are a valuable tool for understanding the “why” behind the numbers contained in surveys. In addition, the group format enables respondents to participate in an exchange of ideas – thus revealing a more in-depth understanding of why opinions are held – that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys. Focus group discussions are comprised of a small number of participants, typically eight to 12 per group. However, depending on the situation, groups may be slightly smaller or larger than the ideal.

NDI's focus group research found that many Moroccans lack confidence in elected leaders' willingness or ability to facilitate change based on citizens' needs. Many citizens attributed this lack of confidence to the perception that elected officials' are only visible in their communities during election campaign periods. This mistrust leads many to feel indifferent toward elections and other political processes due to the belief that, once elected, officials will not fulfill their campaign promises or stay connected with citizens to learn about and address their needs. A woman focus group participant from the village of Oued Ifrane said, *“They take us by the hand during the period of the elections, and after the elections are over they no longer stay in touch with us.”*

The focus group discussions also revealed widespread misunderstanding of the roles of local and national elected representatives. Many citizens blur the lines between elected representatives' roles and the administrative service responsibilities of the state. This causes citizens to have very high expectations of elected representatives to quickly deliver on such issues as improving infrastructure and creating education and employment opportunities, with little awareness of the process required to facilitate such change. All participants expressed deep interest in more opportunities to interact with their elected representatives, and were very supportive of the idea of establishing constituency offices similar to those existing in other countries. One participant said, *“We want direct, in-person contact with our elected representative. We don't want a phone call or any other substitutes”.*

³ NDI conducted a total of 12 focus groups in rural and urban areas of Meknes and El Jadida.

› Regionalization and the 2015 Local and Regional Elections

Recent reforms as part of Morocco's ongoing regionalization process, as well as its regional and communal elections held on September 4, 2015, demonstrate the increasing relevance of outreach by local elected officials. These most recent elections were particularly significant because they took place under the new administrative regions adopted as part of the decentralization process envisioned in the 2011 constitution. Ahead of the elections, the government adopted a long-debated law on redistricting, which reduced the number of regions from 16 to 12⁴ while increasing their fiscal autonomy in order to decentralize power and decision-making; the first major change to the district system since 1997. This law also allowed for regional councils to be directly elected by citizens for the first time.

In June of 2015, the Constitutional Council passed and amended three organic laws that paved the way for the September local elections. One of the most significant amendments was the Council's invalidation of article 54 of the organic law that calls on regional council members to forfeit their position if dismissed from their party. This amendment limits influence of parties on councilors' actions. For example, when elected regional councilors voted to elect council presidents, this allowed them to vote outside of their parties' coalitions.

If deemed appropriate by central government, new budgetary and managerial powers could eventually be devolved to the local and regional councils. In a sense, the 2015 elections mark a step forward in this process. The devolution of powers means that regional and local councilors need to ensure they are in touch with citizens' needs and are adequately informed to determine the direction of local government reforms. The new limit to parties' influence on councilors' actions also demonstrates the importance for councilors to build their records and local support from all citizens regardless of party affiliation.

4 The new twelve regions are: Tanger-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, Oriental, Fès-Meknès, Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, Béni Mellal-Khénifra, Casablanca-Settat, Marrakech-Safi, Drâa-Tafilalet, Souss-Massa, Guelmim-Oued Noun, Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra, Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab

III. NDI Support for Local-level Outreach

› MP Constituency Outreach Program

NDI built on the findings of its 2013 focus group research to design and implement its constituency outreach program, funded by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In January 2014, NDI assisted 14 Moroccan MPs from across the political spectrum in opening constituency offices across the country⁵. Through the two-year constituency outreach initiative, NDI trained participating MPs on outreach best practices from other countries to help them better engage with citizens in their home communities. Building on skills training, NDI provided technical assistance to MPs in holding public events to interface with citizens and advocating in parliament for resolutions to community problems. The Institute also trained assistants for each office on casework management, and helped them set up and manage casework databases to support daily office operations. In addition, NDI facilitated the travel of three MPs to the UK to learn more about different models of parliamentary outreach services. Delegates met with UK MPs and parliamentary staff who support outreach services for parliament and its members.

Since opening their constituency offices, participating MPs have received over 37,684 constituent visits and solved 3,402 of 10,772 cases opened. MPs received a variety of constituent cases and actively responded, often delivering solutions. For example, when 200 low-income families in Marrakech approached their MP for help finding affordable housing, she collaborated with the Ministry of Housing to resolve their urgent problem. Similarly, another MP's office assistant helped a farmer supplement his income by connecting him with a Ministry of Agriculture program distributing free apple trees to diversify his crop. Another MP's office intervened with the Ministry of Health to transfer a challenged youth from prison to a mental health facility.

As a result of this program, participating MPs have gained a greater appreciation for the value of engaging with constituents to learn about their concerns. The increasing number of citizen visits to their offices as the program progressed demonstrated how much citizens appreciate the work that MPs put into

becoming closer to citizens and addressing their needs. MPs have gained satisfaction from helping achieve Citizens' positive reactions to MPs' work through this program helped prove to MPs the value of outreach, and showed that there is a growing appetite among citizens for responsive and accountable governance. Citizens have also learned more about the role of local and national elected representatives, which is key to the successful functioning of democracy and satisfaction of citizens with the work of their elected representatives. Local outreach by officials has already become contagious, as at least four MPs outside of NDI's program have opened their own outreach offices after learning about the successes of MPs in this program.

“Our outreach efforts have helped us gain citizens’ confidence and trust.”

- MP Driss Chtibi, Sefrou

⁵ The 14 constituency offices were in Benguerir, Berrechid, Casablanca Ain Chok, Casablanca Harawiyine, Khenifra, Khouribga, Marrakech, Rabat, Sefrou, Sidi Bennour, Sidi Slimane, Taroundant, Temara, and Tiznit.

› Outreach Assistance for Local Councilors

Through a political party strengthening program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), NDI is assisting Moroccan political parties to strengthen their outreach practices at the branch level, and to coordinate between regional party structures and headquarters to develop policy platforms. As part of this program, NDI has supported local councilors in citizen outreach in preparation for campaign periods. Since 2012, NDI has trained local elected officials across several regions of Morocco on various tools and techniques for engaging citizens, including going door-to-door to survey citizens on their concerns, developing informational brochures about the representative and his or her party, leading public events to listen to citizens, and media relations.

As a result of NDI's assistance, many local councilors have successfully improved their citizen outreach outside of election campaign periods and used information gathered on citizens' needs to inform their work and priorities. They have also shared the information gathered through their work with their party branches and headquarters to help inform their party platforms and assess varying levels of support for the party in different regions.

NDI worked with MPs and local councilors participating in the two above-described programs to gather case studies, tips and lessons learned on outreach from their experience. The remaining sections in this manual contain guidance on the most effective ways these elected representatives have been able to connect with citizens.

IV. Expanding Local Outreach: Guidance for Outreach in Morocco

There are many ways that elected representatives at the local and national levels can improve their outreach to citizens. This section describes outreach activities that have been successfully employed by Moroccan MPs and local councilors, and includes practical tips for organizing those activities.

› Public Forums and Gatherings

Public forums and gatherings are an important means for elected representatives to develop and maintain a local identity in the communities they represent. These meetings afford an official occasion to speak with a very large group of citizens at once. This allows him or her an opportunity to gain a first hand sense of the community's attitudes, problems and values. However, organizing such events has its challenges. Representatives will of course be fielding challenging (and often unfriendly) questions, or be bombarded with the type of requests that may be impossible to accomplish as a public servant.

Moroccan MPs have found that public meetings are one of the most effective ways to engage with citizens and raise their visibility in their communities. Citizens appreciate the opportunity to voice their concerns directly to their elected representative, and benefit from efforts made by their leader to provide updates on new laws and government services available. Citizens also enjoy sharing their needs and priorities with the support of their peers and neighbors.

When structuring a public gathering, event planning becomes critical, and there are numerous ways to do it. Some national legislators regularly travel to their constituencies over the legislative recess, while others hold weekly meetings at select locations. When planning any meeting schedule, here are some basic factors to consider:

What type of gathering? What size? Elected officials can organize different types of meetings to reach specific audiences and to facilitate the preferred type of discussion or interaction with citizens. For example, *town hall meetings* are larger gatherings of 50 or more citizens held for the leader to



A citizen poses a question during an MP outreach event in Tiznit

“My main goal is to use my constituency office to stay closer to constituents and better understand their problems and daily living struggles, so that I can solve or at least contribute to solving their problems.”

- MP Arafat Ahmoun, Khouribga

communicate information about a new law or important change in the community, or to allow citizens to voice concerns on local problems. In Morocco, these are usually held at the level of the commune for both local councilors and MPs. These types of events allow the leader to be visible to a larger number of citizens, but are not ideal for in-depth, one-on-one discussion between citizens and the leader. *Public dialogues*, on the other hand, are smaller meetings for more intimate discussion. These generally involve local leaders from civil society, government, or other local public or private institutions, and are usually focused on a certain topic relevant to all of those present. For example, an official could meet with local civil society organizations to discuss priorities for new community development projects and determine if there is any support the leader can provide.

Plan ahead: Public gatherings require a fair amount of planning to ensure the event moves along efficiently and allows attendees to focus on the objective of the meeting. Factors to consider include setting out a topic and goals for the event, finding a venue to accommodate the anticipated number of attendees, ensuring that the gathering does not occur during a conflicting event, and adequately advertising to ensure that the desired citizens attend. Below are some tips to consider when planning an event:

- **Write it down:** When considering a public gathering, the first step should be to sit down and write out a detailed plan for organizing and holding the event. The plan should include detailed steps needed to take to prepare for the event, such as identifying a venue, coordinating public advertisements or personal invitations, and finding and hiring a catering company if the event will include food or refreshments. These steps can take longer than expected, so it is important to start planning at least two weeks before the event. The event should set out a timeline to make sure you are prepared and organized on the day of the event. As part of the planning process, it is also helpful to create a budget for the event, such as renting a venue, paying for flyers or other advertisements, and catering of food or beverages.
- **Advertisement:** It is important to advertise the event in a way that will attract the appropriate size and type of audience. For a larger gathering like a town hall meeting, it is ideal to advertise boldly and widely to maximize the number of citizens who hear about the event and attend. For a smaller meeting or public dialogue, the advertising should be more targeted to a certain group of citizens or leaders. Targeted advertising is especially important if the meeting is on a specific topic, because it is then crucial that stakeholders and citizens most involved in or affected by the subject at hand are able to attend.

Advertising can be done by distributing flyers for an event, sending targeted invitations by traditional mail or e-mail, posting on social media sites such as Facebook, and by word of mouth. It is important to consider the local context when choosing how to advertise. In rural areas, Moroccan elected leaders have found that word of mouth is the most effective and appreciated form of advertisement. Using social media or other online means to advertise can be effective in urban areas. Social media is also a good way to engage young people to come to the gathering, since they are more likely to be active on social media. The manual further discusses using social media outreach and youth engagement in a later section. Whatever means is used for advertisement, it is recommended to begin advertising one week before the event, at minimum, to maximize the number of attendees.

- **Consider geography:** In rural areas that are mountainous or have poor roads, it can be more difficult for people to get to the gathering. Poor weather conditions can exacerbate these challenges. Consider organizing the gathering in an area that is accessible to the citizens you are trying to engage.
- **Provide food or drinks:** As described above, it can sometimes be difficult for citizens to travel to public gatherings, particularly in rural regions. It is a nice gesture to provide a meal to thank citizens for their attendance. Moroccan MPs have found that it is culturally well-received and sometimes expected to provide a meal at outreach events. While this can be expensive, sometimes it is possible to receive donations for public meetings, since citizens look forward to the opportunity to meet their elected leaders. Some MPs in NDI's program have managed to receive donations from catering companies for their public meetings.
- **Invite the Media:** Inviting the media will further amplify local awareness of the event, improving your reputation for being present in the community. Coverage of the event on television and online or through traditional print media can also allow citizens who were not able to attend to learn about what issues were discussed. This is more relevant for larger public town hall events, rather than public dialogues.

MP Tchikitto Convenes Local Citizens

In August 2014, MP Adil Tchikito held a public event to describe his role as an advocate for the community and distributed a packet detailing his recent work on their behalf. The packet included details on oral and written questions he raised in parliament in response to citizens' concerns expressed in the constituency office, addressing issues such as infrastructure, security, and health services. The event was attended by nearly 90 people, including constituents, journalists and representatives from civil society. The MP and office assistant advertised the event by distributing leaflets on the street, displaying banners in public places, and telling citizens about the event. Tchikito also advertised the event on Facebook and Twitter.



MP Fouad Hajir holds a Town Hall Meeting in Khenifra

In November 2014, MP Fouad Hajir held a public gathering in his local constituency outreach office in Khenifra. Nearly 50 constituents of diverse backgrounds attended the town hall, which featured an extensive discussion between Hajir and the constituents present. Hajir summarized his achievements in parliament

on their behalf, and addressed questions from constituents about such local challenges as poor infrastructure and employment opportunities. Hajir also discussed the positive role of NGOs in the community and specifically encouraged women and youth to become more involved in them.



Responding to constituents' concerns about local unemployment, Hajir emphasized the importance of strengthening the private sector to create jobs for the community, citing ecotourism as a promising area for growth. "We must open up Khenifra and build safe roads to attract tourists to this beautiful region," he said. "Ecotourism, for instance, can save this beautiful region from poverty."

› Going Out into the Community

In addition to holding public gatherings or forums for citizens to attend, it can also be rewarding to go out into the community to speak with citizens during their daily routines. Such activities can include visiting public places like markets, or going from door-to-door in neighborhoods to meet citizens. MPs in NDI's program have found that going door-to-door is the most effective way to reach more citizens, and that it is the most impactful way to make themselves more visible in the community and demonstrate that they are interested in learning about citizens' needs. Further, NDI focus group research conducted in December 2015⁶ revealed that door-to-door campaigning by political leaders is widely appreciated by Moroccan citizens, who interpret such efforts as a sign of respect. Moroccans want more face-to-face interaction with elected leaders and candidates, both during and outside of election periods.

MPs in NDI's constituency outreach program have benefited most from the following activities to go out and interact with citizens:

- **Door-to-Door:** Going door-to-door in a community is one of the most effective ways for elected representatives to meet citizens. This shows that the leader is being proactive in developing a better connection with his or her constituents, rather than depending on citizens to reach out him or her or attend public gatherings. This activity also incurs little to no cost, so it is doable for all elected leaders.
- **Weekly Souk Visits:** Some MPs in NDI's program have had success visiting their local weekly souk, or community market. Since many citizens attend the souk to do their regular shopping, it is

⁶ NDI conducted 24 focus groups in six regions to measure public perceptions of political parties' campaign techniques ahead of the September 2015 municipal and regional elections. These focus groups were funded by NDI's political party strengthening program.

a great way for the MP or local councilor to raise his or her profile within the community and talk to citizens about challenges they are facing and their priorities for local improvement. Attending the Souk is also a good opportunity to demonstrate that one's services are non-partisan, as citizens from all political affiliations and demographics visit the Souk. This can be effective for local and national elected leaders.

- **Visiting Villages:** As described in the section on public gatherings, poor roads, mountainous areas, and severe weather can affect some citizens' ability to attend outreach events or activities organized by an elected representative. This is especially challenging in rural areas. To address this challenge, some MPs have proactively traveled to remote or secluded villages to have small listening events and ensure those citizens have an opportunity to make their voices heard.



MP Driss Chtibi Visits a Remote Village

MP Driss Chtibi visited the village of Al Kasbah to announce to the population that the Ministry of Infrastructure approved a new project to build a new road in their region. Chtibi managed to gather 125 people to announce the good news. He advertised the event using phone calls and word of mouth communication. The event was held at a constituent's house, who provided lunch for the event.

› Cooperating with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs have strong ties to their communities. They are aware of local attitudes toward the political process and governance, as well as the most important changes that citizens want to see. Working with NGOs can therefore be an important way for elected officials to learn about citizen priorities and gain further insights into local issues. By developing relationships with local NGOs, elected leaders can better position themselves to gain their support for local outreach and awareness raising activities, such as organizing public dialogues and door-to-door campaigns.

Several MPs in NDI's constituency outreach program have worked with NGOs to raise public awareness of their constituency offices, cooperate to resolve local issues, and identify priority problems to address in various communities. These relationships most often began with MPs inviting NGOs to their constituency offices for discussion on local issues and to identify areas for cooperation. These efforts have resulted in NGOs expanding public awareness of the MPs' presence in their communities and important cooperation to solve cases presented in MPs' offices. See the below example of how MP Fouad Hajir have engaged local NGOs to strengthen their work.

MP Adil Tchikito Meets with NGOs

On August 14, 2014, MP Adil Tchikito organized a discussion to explore the role of MPs in promoting local development. The office invited Hamid Abkari, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Social Affairs, and Khalil Saadi, a representative of the Minister of Labor and Professional Training, to contribute to the discussion. Despite the summer holiday, nearly 40 people attended the event. Following the discussion, representatives from local CSOs began visiting the constituency office more often to discuss local issues with the MP. CSOs have also used the constituency office



as a community space to meet together and discuss cooperation on a range of local development issues.

MP Fouad Hajir: Connecting Citizens with NGOs

In April 2015, Bouaddi Halima's son, Moncef, was born with a cleft lip and palate, a common but serious genetic malformation that can cause difficulty for infants in feeding. Feeling distressed, Bouaddi contacted MP Hajir's office to seek recommendations for medical assistance for Moncef. After doing some research, the MPs' assistant, Naima, found a vendor in Casablanca who could deliver a uniquely designed bottle that would allow Moncef to feed correctly and get proper nourishment. Naima also identified a non-governmental organization in Casablanca, called Operation Smile, which specializes in facial surgery and could treat Moncef's condition. Over the following 6 months Moncef received ongoing treatment from Operation Smile which resulted in his full recovery in early 2016. "No words can explain how grateful my family is to Assistant Naima," said Bouaddi. "Her assistance enabled my child and entire family to smile." After discussing with Bouaddi how widespread this issue is in the Khenifra region, Operation Smile organized a medical caravan to the region to serve other infants born with this condition.

› Leveraging Social Media and other Online Tools

As described in the section on public gatherings, social media sites such as Facebook can be very effective and inexpensive outreach tools. This is particularly true in Morocco, where internet usage is very high compared to the rest of the Middle East and North Africa⁷ and where there are over ten

⁷ According to a 2015 study by the Moroccan National Telecommunication Agency, 39.4% of Moroccans use mobile internet.



MP Adil Tchikito regularly uses social media to communicate with the public.

million Facebook users⁸ MPs Adil Tchickito, Fouad Hajir and Fouzia Elbayed have used Facebook to advertise outreach events in their constituencies, discuss their positions on local and national issues, and report achievements to the public. MPs' constituency offices have also increased their connections to citizens on social media. For example, between May and September 2014, some MPs in NDI's constituency outreach program doubled the number of 'likes' on their Facebook pages. MP Lahcen Benouari also has a YouTube channel where he posts updates on his work.

Local Councilor Nouhad Safi in the constituency of Moulycoub uses Facebook and WhatsApp, a mobile chat application, to connect with citizens at almost no cost. Safi has found that citizens appreciate using WhatsApp, as it provides more direct personal interaction than Facebook or other social media platforms. Local Councilor Badia Bennani, who represents the neighborhoods of Agdal and Hay Riyad in Rabat, worked with local institutions and citizens to set up a WhatsApp group for responding to citizens' problems. Citizens can post pictures of issues in their community, such as garbage that needs to be collected or pot holes in the street, and Bennani works with government agencies to address the problem.

It is important to note that using online tools and social media for outreach tends to be more effective in urban areas, as internet usage is significantly higher in cities than in rural regions. Online outreach is also an effective way to engage youth, as 75% of Moroccan between the ages of 15 and 24 have access to the internet.⁹

➤ Ensuring Inclusive Local Engagement

For democracy to be effective and sustainable, it is important for all citizens to be able to voice their opinions and engage in the political process equally without suffering bias or reprisal. Inclusive political processes increase the likelihood that political discussions and developments reflect the interests of the diverse groups that comprise a population. Although women comprise more than half of Morocco's population¹⁰, they are underrepresented in political leadership. Traditional gender roles often confine women to roles as homemakers and discourage them from taking leadership roles in their communities or voicing their concerns to their elected representatives.

Similarly, although 30 percent of Moroccans are between the ages of 15 and 29, people in this age group often face barriers to participating in political processes. Young people seldom have the respect of senior political leaders and are rarely viewed by adults as community members with a legitimate

8 <http://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ma>

9 <http://www.nielsen.com/mena/en/insights/news/2014/navigating-the-moroccan-internet-users-online-habits.html>

10 http://www.indexmundi.com/morocco/demographics_profile.html

voice. This limited appreciation for the value of young people's opinions and perspectives provides them with little incentive to participate in political processes. Women and youth are also disproportionately

“This program is very beneficial for us women, because due to our culture, we cannot easily meet with people in cafes in the evenings, and we cannot be everywhere and connect with citizens wherever they are. The constituency office gives us a neutral and decent space, where women MPs can perform their role in a professional environment.”

– MP Fouzia El Bayed, Casablanca

affected by unemployment and limited educational opportunities, which feeds apathy and the perception that they are unable to affect political change.

Due to these challenges, local and national elected representatives need to make concerted efforts to engage women and youth. Many Moroccan MPs and local councilors have tried to address this by making targeted efforts to connect with the women and youth they represent. Below are techniques Moroccan MPs and local councilors have used to involve women and young people.

Women

Engaging women and encouraging them to voice their opinions and concerns can be challenging in conservative areas. This is also often the case in rural areas, where more limited education opportunities results in less understanding of the role of MPs, and cultural perceptions about the role of women discourage them from taking the lead in addressing community issues. Below are some tips from Moroccan MPs on reaching out to women:

- **Door-to-door:** As described above, going door-to-door is one of the most effective ways to reach citizens. MPs and office assistants have gone door-to-door to discuss the role of MPs and the importance of women being active as community leaders. In places where women feel uncomfortable leaving the home to meet their elected representative, this is a way to proactively engage them. When going door-to-door, it can be helpful to have a team member from both genders to better ensure that the constituent who answers the door is comfortable speaking with your team.
- **Women to Women:** Women tend to be more receptive to encouragement from other women to engage with their representative on community issues. After a woman MP assistant in NDI's constituency outreach program spent a few days going door-to-door to meet women and talk to them about the MPs' role and presence in the constituency of Sefrou, the constituency office saw a consistent increase in the number of visits from women. Please see the example below for more details on this door to door effort in Sefrou:

Sefrou Assistant Soumaya goes door to door to engage women

Women often face challenges in becoming community leaders in Morocco, particularly in rural areas. This challenge is present in Ribat al-Khair in the region of Sefrou, where social expectations often confine women to roles as homemakers. In the summer of 2015, the local MP's office assistant Soumaya Belari spent a day going door-to-door to discuss the importance of women's leadership in the community. In a region where men are more present and understanding of the importance of having a constituency office in Ribat Al Khair. Soumaya discussed the role of an MP and clarified how it is different from the president of a local commune. She also discussed the function of constituency offices and encouraged them to visit the office to express their concerns. After this door-to-door campaign, the MP and Soumaya noted that the number of women visiting the constituency office on a regular basis nearly doubled.



Youth

Young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment and other social and political challenges, and often feel like their ideas and opinions are not taken seriously by senior political elites. This causes them to have little faith in elected leaders' willingness or ability to create positive change to address the needs of young people. They have a very negative view of political leaders, and often carry the belief that all political processes are dominated by corruption. This perception makes it difficult for elected officials to engage youth in their communities and convince them that their interests will be taken into account.

Below are techniques Moroccan elected leaders have used to successfully connect with young citizens:

- **Social media:** Young people in Morocco are very active on social media, and on Facebook in particular. Using social media to advertise outreach events, report on new policies and achievements is a great way to engage young people who are online.
- **Door-to-door:** Young people also appreciate efforts from elected leaders to proactively reach out to them in person. Door-to-door campaigns are a good way to meet local youth, educate them on the role of elected officials, and begin to gain their trust. It can also be helpful to visit schools, universities and cafes, as youth often spend a lot of time in these places.
- **Look to NGOs:** As described in previous sections, it is helpful to develop relationships with local NGOs to facilitate collaboration on community development. NGOs can also act as agents for an elected representative to educate locals on what services their elected leader can provide. Youth

in Morocco are often active in NGOs, so working with NGOs can be a great way to engage young people.

- **Youth centers:** Several communes in Morocco have youth centers, which are popular spaces for youth across the country to meet and exchange culture, sport and recreational knowledge and skills. These centers, supported financially by the Ministry of Youth and Sport, are a great place to meet young people. Some elected representatives have visited these centers to speak with local youth about their needs. See below about a special effort made by MP Mina Bouhdoud to assist youth in acquiring space and equipment for a new youth center in Taroudant.

MP Mina Bouhdoud: Facilitating establishment of a Youth Center

In summer of 2015, a group of young citizens visited MP Mina Bouhdoud's constituency office in Taroudant to seek her support in establishing a youth center in their commune. The Ministry of Youth and Sport manages such youth centers in various communes across the country, which are popular spaces for youth to meet and exchange cultural, sport and recreational knowledge and skills. These centers have been the starting point for many prominent Moroccan athletes and artists.

MP Bouhdoud contacted a local representative of the Ministry of Youth and Sport to advocate for the opening of a new youth center in Taroudant. One month later, the ministry responded by providing a free space for the youth center. Local youth worked with the MP and local government in the following months to acquire basic equipment for the center, including computers, TVs, chairs, tables and a variety of sports equipment and art supplies.

V. Serving Constituents Through Local Offices

In many countries, legislators conduct constituent relations without the use of local offices or other sites designed to facilitate interaction between legislators and constituents. In these countries, meetings that take place between legislators and citizens occur in homes, offices, cafes or other locations.

In some countries, legislators are afforded budgets to set up constituency offices, closer to constituents. Such offices have a separate staff from those in the capital, and often separate financial resources to purchase equipment and pay for staff and outreach activities. Often, funds are allocated by the legislature for constituent relations activities, and provided to each individual legislator or to each party (who have representation in the legislature), who then determines how best to spend the money. Constituency offices can be located in a municipal building, or can be stand alone. They can also be located in political party offices, which can be a good first step to building up outreach practices where the legislature does not provide funds for constituency offices, although it may discourage constituents who support other parties from coming to voice their concerns. Regardless of where the office is located, all constituents, including those who voted for the legislator and his or her party and those who did not, need to feel that it is somewhere they are comfortable visiting and discussing their concerns.



Patricia Flores, a former Federal legislator from Mexico, used a van as a “mobile office” to meet with constituents throughout her district. On market day, she parks the van next to the market area and meets with constituents at a table set up outside the back of the van. While there she collects constituent contact information for her monthly newsletter and records their concerns, interests, or demands. She usually found that most requests did not pertain to her mandate, so she directed them to the appropriate government agency.

Well-run local offices can increase a legislator’s visibility in his or her constituency and convey a sense of permanence about a legislator’s participation in a community. They can help to make the constituent outreach activities described in the previous chapter more efficient by providing a consistent place to conduct meetings with constituents and a centralized location for dealing with casework or individual requests for help from citizens. The rest of this section analyzes a range of tips, tools and techniques for constituency office operations. While they are geared toward national legislators with local offices, most of these techniques and materials can be readily adapted to suit the needs of any elected representative at the national or local level, whether or not they have a constituency office.

Support for an Institutionalized Constituency Office Program in Macedonia

In 2003, NDI launched a pilot constituency office initiative in Macedonia that was ultimately adopted by the Macedonian Parliament in 2013. During the program, NDI provided MPs with technical assistance on outreach, processing casework and constituency office management. As the program evolved, MPs cooperated with local government officials to establish constituency offices in municipal buildings in order



to emphasize the non-partisan nature of their work. After several more years of work by MPs and debates within parliament on establishing an institutionalized outreach program, the parliament adopted a program in 2013 to support 75 constituency offices across the country.

The offices are currently staffed by assistants who are recruited through an open competition. The assistants participate in a training programme to ensure that they know how to respond to the cases they receive and that they are adequately prepared to support the MPs. According to local

analysts, the constituency offices have had a significant impact on the public understanding of the role and abilities of MPs. At the outset, voters assumed that meeting an MP was an opportunity to lobby for direct and individual support, such as an offer of employment. But the system has evolved and citizens have established how to use the system most effectively.

The constituency office program in Macedonia classifies citizen cases into three main areas. First, the offices can help people in navigating government bureaucracy and accessing benefits such as pensions or other welfare entitlements. Second are infrastructure projects, such as improving roads and railways. Third, for issues involving public services, such as health and education, the MP works with local authorities and parliamentary colleagues to resolve problems.

The offices are situated so that no citizen is more than 30 kilometers from an office and most citizens are within 5 kilometers. The offices have affected the political culture and the attitude of MPs to conduct outreach. After adopting the constituency office program, the parliament made every Friday constituency day, when parliament does not sit and MPs are expected to be present in their local offices.

MPs Collaborate Across Party Lines to Improve Outreach in Serbia

In 2009, NDI cooperated with the Serbian Parliament to launch five pilot constituency offices across the country to facilitate communication between MPs and citizens. The five participating MPs identified their own office space for the program, which included political party offices, local government buildings, or space they rented with their own funds. Similar to NDI's constituency outreach program in Morocco, NDI

trained MPs and office assistants on outreach techniques and casework management, and assisted them in organizing outreach events in their constituencies to discuss local issues and pending legislation.

In the six years since the offices were established, feedback received from citizens through the constituency offices was incorporated into amendments to laws such as the Laws on the Foundations of the Serbian Education System, Infertility Treatment for Women, Pension Insurance and Persons with Disabilities. The pilot project inspired more than 30 other MPs to open their own constituency offices to improve their outreach. Recognizing joint interest, many MPs from different political parties worked together to open multi-member constituency offices in their municipalities. For example, in January 2015, six MPs representing three different parties cooperated to establish a shared constituency office in a municipal government building in the city of Kraljevo in Central Serbia. The office is staffed by 5 volunteer assistants. Over a period of one year since its establishment, MPs used the shared office to solve 100 citizen cases on a wide range of issues. They also launched a website¹¹ and Facebook page¹² to enhance their communication with the public.

› Maintaining a Non-partisan Perception

As noted in previous sections, it is important for elected representatives to maintain a non-partisan perception. While an elected representative's work can benefit his or her party's reputation and provide important information to inform its platform, a successful elected leader must serve all of the citizens in his or her constituency equally, regardless of political affiliation. Below are the most important tips from Moroccan MPs on maintaining a non-partisan perception in their constituencies:

- When speaking with constituents to discuss the role of an elected representative and advertise the local constituency office, clearly **stress that all services are equally available to all citizens**. Opportunities to remind citizens of the non-partisan nature of an elected representative include public outreach forums, door-to-door campaigns, social media posts, and any other communication with citizens. This can also be stressed in an outreach brochure.
- When advertising a public outreach gathering, constituency office or general services offered by an elected representative, **never display party-affiliated symbols or colors**. It is also important that a constituency office does not display any party symbols or colors.

› Office Brochure

A brief brochure can help convey a positive first impression of the representative. These brochures are generally handouts or leaflets allowing legislators the opportunity to introduce themselves, their activities, and explain what an elected representative does. A good office brochure does not necessarily need to be an expensive one. Whether creating a simple one page flyer or a detailed glossy publication, there

¹¹ <http://www.poslanicka-kancelarija.org/>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/poslanici.kv?fref=ts>

are certain elements that can help create the right document for any office. Brochures can be a great addition to an MP constituency office, but can also be a useful public communication tool for locally elected representatives. MPs in NDI's constituency outreach program successfully used brochures to spread local awareness of their offices.

Contents of a Professional Brochure:

A good brochure should contain some (if not all) of the following:

- A basic biography and/or introductory statement by the representative;
- Essential contact information;
- Pictures of the representative in the capital, and in the constituency;
- Where the leader represents a specific geographic location, maps and/or visual images of the area represented;
- A brief statement thanking voters for their trust and affording the representative the privilege of representing the constituency. The brochure is also the place to tell constituents what motivated the representative to want to serve the community. Tell them why public service was appealing, what issues are primary to the legislative agenda, and what has been done to help constituents and the district more generally.
- A basic listing of the types of services the legislator and his/her staff provide, or areas in which the staff can provide assistance. This brochure should try to tell constituents how the legislators are helping them solve their problems and expound specific areas of expertise. Of all of the challenges involved in fashioning a brochure, listing the types of services the office provides usually proves the most difficult. Often constituents possess very little knowledge of what an elected representative actually does and what types of activities constitute “constituent services.” Creating a short list of services the office provides and incorporating them into the brochure by way of an example helps take the feeling of arbitrariness out of situations when the representative or staff cannot assist someone with an issue.



MP Oum Banine Lahlou's brochure, featured in her constituency office

➤ **The Role of Office Assistants**

In politics, first impressions matter. A first and lasting impression of any elected representative is frequently made when constituents interact directly with the legislator or his or her staff. All staff that work in the constituency office should be professional and courteous.

An effective office assistant can ensure that the office operates smoothly and maintains a positive image in the community. Anyone hired should have appropriate skills for the job, or be willing and able to learn. The specific duties of an office assistant will vary for each office, but should include at least some of the following: managing the office; helping constituents to connect with appropriate government offices; arranging meetings; keeping records of meetings and constituent requests; assisting with telephone calls and other constituent correspondence; planning public meetings and other activities for the representative to attend; organizing news conferences and writing news releases; and, where appropriate, help the legislator report to the party about his or her constituency work. If possible, hiring professional experts to address the concerns of citizens can make a big difference.

Each of the 14 MPs who participated in NDI's constituency outreach initiative worked with one office assistant. The office assistants were a crucial element of the constituency office, taking responsibility for the daily office operations listed above. The assistants also drafted oral and written questions for their MPs to raise in parliament based on concerns raised by citizens in their constituency offices.

Another low-cost way to gain assistance in managing daily outreach duties is to hire interns. This not only provides elected representatives with an important resource to expand outreach capacity, but provides students or other young people with valuable experience and skills that can later help them get a job. One of the MPs in NDI's program hired interns for a temporary period, described below. Hiring outreach assistants or interns is also a great way to get young people invested in politics. Many office assistants involved in NDI's program who were previously apathetic about politics now dream of becoming an MP.

Hiring Interns to Assist with Constituent Relations

In summer of 2015, MP Adil Tchikito hosted two students for two-month internships in his Temara constituency office. The interns supported the MP assistant in his daily responsibilities, including receiving citizen visits and recording cases. They also assisted in conducting door-to-door campaigns to raise local citizen awareness of the constituency office and the role of their MP. The interns became deeply engaged in their work and appreciated the opportunity to learn about the role and duties of MPs.



Temara constituency office interns follow up on cases

At the end of the internship period, one of the interns, Ikram Al Akouaa, said, "This was the experience of my life. I learned so much in such a short period, and felt like I accomplished something important because I was able to assist in solving people's problems in a concrete way." Fatima Razali said, "Working with such a young and dynamic MP was a great challenge for me. MP Tchikito and Adil trusted me and made me feel fully integrated into the office, which was very motivating. The internship was a great and unique experience."

Having interns was also very helpful for the constituency office. MP Assistant Adil said, “We were able to process more cases with the interns here. Their support for our daily office operations allowed us to do more door-to-door campaigns to raise local visibility of the constituency office. The interns were especially helpful in engaging more women during door-to-door activities, as local women were more willing to open up to them than the MP and assistant, both of whom are men.”

› Listening and Responding to Citizens' Problems

In essence, “constituent relations” means nothing more than helping to find solutions to citizens' problems. Whether it is facilitating trash collection, having the electricity turned on, solving a pension problem, or recruiting new businesses to the constituency, working with the local public administration to solve citizen's problems is vital to success as a representative. Receiving, responding to and tracking progress on solving citizens problems can be broken down into a multi-step process called casework.

Casework overview

Casework simply means engaging in the bureaucratic process of helping individuals solve the problems they are facing. All too often the majority of people are unsure what a legislator can do for them. While most people instinctively understand that elected representatives and staff have a much broader knowledge of public administration than the basic constituent, and while they realize legislators have contacts and connections that can speed up an otherwise difficult and lengthy process, they do not necessarily understand the types of activities in which legislators can and cannot intervene. This is the reason for publishing lists of services available like those noted previously when discussing office brochures.

This section breaks down the steps of receiving and responding to cases. Moroccan elected representatives have successfully used the following process to resolve important issues in their communities.

Office Hours/Meeting Constituents

The first step in addressing citizens' problems is making yourself available to listen. While this can be done in a local cafe, market, or other public or private venues, this section will describe how the process can be done using a constituency office. Many of these techniques, however, can be applied to other contexts.

Although many legislators spend the majority of their time in the legislature, the constituency office is the ultimate symbol of a representative's local presence. If legislators have a constituency office, and have some voice in determining where it will be located, try to place the office in a highly visible location. This could mean a stand-alone office, an office owned by the party, or even public space that is set aside from time to time as space to be used by elected officials. Be sure to visibly post hours of operation as well. Also, highlight the select hours and specific days the legislator has set aside personal time to meet with constituents.

Unless a constituent seems extremely uncomfortable sharing his or her personal problems in a small group setting, members of staff should sit in on the meetings and take notes about the issues discussed. This helps alleviate the burden on a representative who may only have a few minutes to dedicate to specific issues, and it allows the representative the opportunity to introduce the constituent to the staff member who will ultimately be doing the follow-up work. Introducing staff into the process frees up valuable time for the legislator and affords the staff person a chance to establish the relationship necessary to resolve the problem in the future.

Communicating with Government Agencies

After receiving a case, the next step is often referring the constituent to a government agency that can solve his or her problem, or communicating with the government on the citizen's behalf. Depending on the magnitude of the issue at hand, solving it can be a lengthy process. After determining the best course of action and assessing what the process may look like, it is important to be very transparent to the citizen about what the process will require and how long it may take.

For example, in the summer of 2014, a citizen came to MP Lahcen Bounouari's constituency office in Tiznit seeking assistance after his house was destroyed by the government because it was identified as a safety hazard to neighbors due to its dilapidated condition. The MP worked with the Ministry of Justice to resolve this issue by getting compensation for the citizen to rebuild his home, but the process took more than a year. As described in the first sections of this manual, citizens are often unaware of the multiple steps and approval processes an elected representative and government institution must go through to address some cases. It is important to be honest with a citizen about your capabilities.

“I am so grateful for the help that MP Assistant Solhi provided to solve my case. I never thought that my concerns would be heard at the level of the parliament or national government before this experience. This office makes us feel like our MP is so much closer to the community.” – Mohamed Benmouh, after he received compensation to build a new home due to the assistance provided by MP Bounouari and his assistant.

The following are tips from Moroccan MPs and local councilors on liaising with government agencies to solve citizens' cases:

- **When possible, contact the government agency on the citizen's behalf.** If an elected representative contacts a person he or she knows within an agency, the case is often solved more quickly.
- As often as possible, MPs **should utilize written and oral questions** during parliamentary sessions to highlight community problems. This may facilitate discussion on the issue and ultimately lead to a formal resolution. It can also show citizens that you are actively representing their interests.
- Always keep in mind the importance of **maintaining strong relationships with local and national government officials.** These relationships can be crucial to solving citizens' cases.
- **Use the media.** Talking about issues you are working to address on social or other types of media can pressure institutions to work with you to resolve the issue more quickly.

Tracking Casework

Elected representatives and their staff need to keep a good record of efforts made to help constituents. When someone enters the office, or meets with the legislator, access to documentation of who they were and why they came is vital, so that legislators and staff are not relying on their memories alone to follow up on and resolve the situation later.

NDI trained office assistants in its constituency outreach program on casework management, and helped them set up an online casework tracking database. The assistants used Google Apps to manage their cases, as it is available for free. The assistants used this system consistently to record and track constituent cases. Below are the steps they went through for each case they receive:

- When receiving a case by phone or in person, write down all details of the case. This can be done in a word document on a computer or in a paper notebook.
- Classify each case as open, refused or resolved. Always keep track of any changes in classification as they happen.
- If the MP assistant determines that he can resolve the case using his own local connections, he does so. If it requires the MPs' assistance, the assistant makes a note and reports it to the MP to get the resolution process started as soon as possible.
- MPs establish consistent hours to be in the office each week to meet with constituents. Citizens can schedule meetings ahead of time on those days.
- MP assistants have weekly meetings with their MPs to go over their open cases and consider next steps needed to resolve them. For example, in Temara, Adil Tchikito and his constituency assistant meet each Friday to review their case log.
- Provide weekly updates for constituents on the status of their case. This provides constituents with peace of mind that the MP is working to resolve their problem.

MP Lahlou submits inquiry to Ministry of Solidarity and Women

In response to a constituent's request, MP Oum El Banine Lahlou submitted a written inquiry to the Minister of Solidarity and Women, Bassima Hakkaoui, as to why her constituency of Berrechid was not covered by a recent national campaign led by the Ministry on the Prevention of Violence against Women. Within one week of MP Lahlou's request, the ministry responded by giving a speech on violence against women during a conference in Had Soualem, a town in Berrechid where there was recently a domestic violence incident.



VI. Conclusions on Outreach in Morocco

Effective constituent outreach by local and national elected officials is beneficial for the officials themselves, citizens, political parties, and legislatures. The experiences of Moroccan elected officials who helped shape the content of this manual demonstrate the value of constituent outreach. Their efforts to better connect with constituents and represent the needs of citizens has increased their ability to fulfill their role, combat negative attitudes toward elected representatives, and meet the demand in Morocco for greater access to elected representatives.

“The outreach methods we used through our constituency offices, especially town hall meetings and public dialogues, have helped us gain the confidence and trust of citizens.”

- MP Driss Chtibi, Sefrou

Many international best practices on outreach can be successfully adapted to the Moroccan context. Moroccan elected representatives who have applied them, however, have found several important themes to keep in mind when attempting to improve engagement with citizens. When conducting outreach in Morocco, the following are some of the most important tips to keep in mind:

- **Make it personal.** As in most countries, citizens appreciate direct, in-person contact from their elected representatives. This is especially true in Morocco, to remember to prioritize opportunities to directly interface with your constituents. Going door-to-door is one of the most impactful techniques to reach citizens, and women and youth in particular.
- **Consider geography.** When organizing public gatherings with constituents, try to make it as accessible as possible to citizens in remote areas. If not possible to include these most isolated communities, make an effort to visit them to listen to their needs.
- **Involve local NGOs.** NGOs have deep ties to citizens in their communities, and can therefore be a strong link between constituents and their elected representatives.
- **Use social media.** Social media can be a powerful tool to communicate with the public, and particularly with young people. Note that it is always important to consider the local context, and social media usage is much lower in rural areas.
- **Women to women.** It is important to make a concerted effort to engage women, particularly in rural, conservative communities. Women in these contexts are most effectively engaged by other women.
- **Remain non-partisan.** It is very important for elected representatives to be non-partisan in their work, equally reaching out to and serving citizens regardless of political affiliation. Elected representatives who actively serve the public in a nonpartisan manner and maintain a positive reputation often see benefits for their parties.

These tips will help elected officials in Morocco to make the most of their outreach efforts. Regardless of the size of your budget or constituency, there are inexpensive, effective ways to reach out to citizens. Any time or money invested in efforts to connect with constituents will pay off in the end, as it will show them that you are serious about representing their interests and improving their lives. Gaining citizens' confidence is crucial to success as an elected official, and central to effective, participatory and sustainable democracy.

This manual was developed with support from the British Embassy in Rabat and the United States Agency for International Development.

voice listen citizen outreach
representation trust
confidence accountability
engage proximity



NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC
INSTITUTE
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS