



**Review of Partner Relationships with GONG and *Transparencia***  
**NDI Project Code 03527**  
NDI Citizen Participation Team  
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## **Preface**

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has worked with hundreds of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in more than 65 countries. There are many examples of NDI programs designed to help local organizations monitor political processes, advocate policy changes, educate citizens, and mobilize under-represented groups, while strengthening their overall organizational performance. Oftentimes, the NGOs are new or emerging organizations and NDI finds itself helping the groups during their formative development period. In many cases, the partner groups succeed in becoming successful and sustainable democratic activists in their countries. On the other hand, there have been some instances when groups have not been able to perform effectively or independently, despite NDI's technical assistance.

NDI's in-house citizen participation team, which provides best practices and other support services to the Institute's civic programs worldwide, conducted a modest research effort to identify some of the lessons learned and best practices of NDI's technical assistance to local partner organizations. This report presents the findings and offers recommendations from that research in order to provide NDI staff a "road map" when working with similar groups in the future.

The citizen participation team would like to thank those that took time to participate in the research project, including Rob Benjamin, Emmy Dekker, Matt Dippell, Melissa Estok, Karen Gainer, Amy Gray, Suzana Jasic, Kate Kelsch, Salomon Lerner, Mike Marshall, Lisa McLean, Percy Medina, Sky Mehringer, Pat Merloe, Natalia Moustafina, Paulina Ojeda, Pepi Patron, Katie Prud'homme, Rafael Roncagliolo, Megan Volk Unangst, Federico Velarde, Ken Wollack, and Sarah Workman.

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## Executive Summary

To help develop and deliver high-quality technical-assistance programs for local NGOs, citizen participation team members have spent the past few months researching NDI's technical assistance to two local partners: the Croatian group GONG and the Peruvian group *Transparencia*. The citizen participation team chose these organizations, in particular, because both are well-recognized both locally and internationally as successful and sustainable. NDI has worked with each organization since their inception and the relationships continue to evolve.

“I think that if NDI didn't exist, it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, for *Transparencia* to execute its activities”.

- Federico Velarde,  
*Transparencia* founding member  
and member of its Board of  
Directors

After reviewing a variety of reports, examining websites, and interviewing key informants, the citizen participation team uncovered two elements that appear critical to the overall success achieved by both groups. The first element concerns the leaders of each organization and the second deals with NDI's particular approach to providing assistance. Together, these elements allowed the organizations an important degree of independence and prompted informed actions and a certain level of confidence that contributed to enhancing their competence.

The leadership of GONG and *Transparencia* had a significant impact on the growth and development of their respective organizations, and it is clear that, without that leadership, neither organization would have succeeded as they did. In short, leadership capacity was a fundamental “raw material” that both organizations possessed, which allowed them to build solid organizational structures, procedures, and programs. The ability of GONG and *Transparencia* leaders to make “sound” decisions early on exemplifies this leadership capacity. Deciding to take political action to advance democracy was one of those initial decisions. Choosing to work with NDI was another. Further testimony to the leadership is the fact that both organizations were able to sustain leadership transitions over time.

Nonetheless, the natural leadership capacity of both organizations could only take them so far. Without outside technical assistance at critical points along the developmental path, the two organizations would not be as successful as they are today. NDI provided necessary information and know-how that permitted the groups to take well-organized, influential political actions during important junctures in their respective countries' democratic development.

From the beginning, NDI viewed GONG and *Transparencia* as partners that possessed the potential to grow and take on more self-determined responsibility. In each case, NDI worked to support the initiatives of the partners, rather than viewing the organizations as implementers of NDI's initiatives. Moreover, NDI's representatives tried to help the groups achieve two goals simultaneously: organize and implement effective programs and grow into self-sustaining NGOs. The balance that NDI struck when addressing these objectives is what makes the two cases very interesting.

Overall, NDI's assistance can be described best as a form of stewardship. NDI did not give directives or force particular developments or decisions. Instead, NDI took its cues from the organizations and acted more as an advisor that helped facilitate problem-solving and decision-making, and also as an instructor that added value through the transfer of knowledge and skills. Each organization desired and valued this assistance.

As the organizations grew and matured, NDI's assistance changed accordingly. After only partnering for a year or so, NDI's relationship with both groups developed to the point where NDI only provided technical assistance when the groups themselves made a specific request. NDI's approach, along with each organization's leadership, seemed to stimulate growth and a "can-do" attitude on the part of GONG and *Transparencia*.

The following pages provide a more in-depth analysis of the research findings. The report also includes some recommendations for future NDI relationships with local organizations.

## **Methodology**

The citizen participation team conducted this modest research effort over a three month period. The process began with a desk-top review of written materials, including NDI, GONG, and *Transparencia* reports, and third party publications, such as Marcia Bernbaum's on *Transparencia*. The team also distributed questionnaires to a select group of individuals who had been involved in NDI's work with GONG and *Transparencia*.

Based on the desktop review findings and NDI's existing body of information about work with local NGOs in general, the research team came up with 11 hypotheses that formed the basis for a set of interview questions. The team then conducted interviews with present and past NDI staff members and with key informants from GONG and *Transperencia*. The team conducted the majority of the interviews over the telephone. However, the opportunity did arise to have face-to-face interviews with leaders of both GONG and *Transparencia*. As a matter of fact, the day before she was to be interviewed by NDI Senior Advisor Aaron Azelton, GONG President Suzana Jasic held a three-hour meeting with GONG staff members to help develop an accurate set of answers to the research questions. Not only did this session highlight the interest that the GONG staff members had in the research, but also the inclusive nature of GONG's organizational culture.

The questionnaires and an initial set of hypothesis are attached to this report. Those interested in reading the research and interview notes, please feel free to contact NDI's citizen participation team.

## **Brief Background of GONG and *Transparencia***

**GONG** (<http://www.gong.hr/eng/>)

Before the April 1997 presidential election, anti-war organizations, together with student associations, from all over Croatia started the Citizens Organized to Monitor Elections (GONG) initiative. The goal of the initiative was to organize citizens to observe elections in an independent and non-partisan manner and to increase the integrity of the electoral process. At the time, the Election Law only allowed political party observers to monitor elections. Consequently, 234 GONG volunteers stood outside the polling stations with questionnaires and surveyed voters on their way out. The recruitment of these volunteers was born out of two fundamental organizational values: not paying observers and volunteers, and accepting fewer but a more motivated number of volunteers.

After the 1997 election, the anti-war NGOs handed over the reigns of GONG to the student associations, changing the face of the organization. Consequently, GONG decided to work through the Croatian legal system and to advocate for electoral reforms.

In 1998, GONG, together with the Helsinki Committee, went to the Constitutional Court to challenge the legality of the mobilization of nonpartisan

monitors. The Court ruled in favor of GONG, stating that the constitution upholds the right of citizens to monitor elections. This ruling was a victory for GONG and opened the door for the organization to work on changes to the electoral law.

For the November 1998 Dubrovnik county elections, GONG implemented a significant observation mission utilizing the lessons learned from 1997. These elections earned GONG a high profile both within the country and internationally, and set the stage for the 2000 elections.

The “Orange Amendment,” adopted by the Croatian parliament (*Sabor*) on October 29, 1999, was drawn up and submitted by GONG. The amendment – named Orange because it corresponds to GONG’s organizational color – established Article 107 of the new Election Law. The article permits independent and non-partisan observers to monitor elections for both houses of the *Sabor* (*Sabor* has since been reduced to one house).

GONG changed leadership again in 1999. This change was a crucial moment for GONG, because two different views about the future direction of the organization existed within the organization. By following the protocols in the group’s statutes, the members democratically replaced their leaders.

For the 2000 parliamentary elections, GONG mobilized more than 5,000 volunteers. This achievement strengthened GONG’s reputation as a well-organized and legitimate group. In recognizing that there was valuable work to do after elections, the organization expanded its mandate beyond election monitoring to connecting citizens with their elected representatives.

In accordance with its mandate, GONG first looked to the *Sabor*. It advocated parliament to open its doors and to allow the public in. GONG’s first step was to establish parliamentary tours for the public, enabling Croatian citizens their first opportunity to even enter the *Sabor*. Next, GONG developed a parliamentary internship program. This program has grown to include other branches and levels of the government. GONG also started a “Citizens Hour” initiative, which brings together government officials and constituents in various settings. In addition, GONG has engaged over 58,000 students, in schools, in the “I Vote for the First Time” program. Over time, GONG has become the most recognizable NGO in Croatia<sup>1</sup>.

In 2003, the *Sabor* awarded GONG the *GOLDEN COAT OF ARMS* award for their work in developing the parliament, strengthening democracy, promoting tolerance, and protecting human rights in the country. GONG used the financial prize of 100,000 Kuna associated with the award to transport more than 15,000 students to tour parliament in 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> “Attitudes Towards NGOs in Croatia” Survey Report, Ominbus Survey in Croatia by GFK, Spring 2002, pg 12 For more information, access the report at:  
<http://topics.developmentgateway.org/civic/rc/filedownload.do~itemId=402212>

**Transparencia** (<http://www.transparencia.org.pe>)

A group of Peruvian professionals and intellectuals established *Transparencia* in July 1994. The group was concerned with the state of political affairs in the wake of Fujimori's self-coup in 1992 and the drafting of a new Constitution in 1993, both of which limited citizen participation. Due to their familiarity with organizations in other countries that monitored election processes, this group established an organization that would monitor elections and, at the same time, carry out civic education campaigns.<sup>2</sup> From the beginning, the group was thinking long-term, rather than only focusing on the immediate elections.

*Transparencia's* main goals include: strengthening the democratic system through electoral observation; promoting a culture of vigilance and active citizen participation; contributing to the oversight and control of political institutions and actors; and building consensus among political and social actors.

On average, *Transparencia* has mobilized 12,000 volunteers for each national-level election. The group's Citizen Education program has produced a number of manuals, including "Citizen Participation," "Municipal Management," and "Being a Citizen." *Transparencia* has also created "Directory of Communications," a resource that offers information on legislation, citizenship and electoral processes. The Legislative Measures program hosts seminars on the reform of the Peruvian electoral system. *Transparencia* also has grown into the regional leader in election observation, being called upon to host workshops and trainings and to observe elections in various countries.

One important moment in the history of *Transparencia* was the 2000 presidential elections when *Transparencia's* "quick count" helped demonstrate that President Fujimori's election was fraudulent. *Transparencia* refused to observe the run-off elections and this eventually contributed to Fujimori's resignation just a few months later.

## **Overview of NDI's Work with GONG and *Transparencia***

### **GONG**

In preparation for the 1997 Croatian presidential election, two NDI representatives provided technical assistance to GONG on election monitoring. These representatives trained GONG on various aspects of election monitoring including how to train volunteers and coordinate logistics. The relationship quickly grew as NDI also worked with GONG – through guided practice, training sessions, and consultations – on key aspects of organizational development, such as financial management, reporting, communications, planning and decision-making.

NDI and GONG worked together to create manuals and guides covering different organizational capacity areas, which GONG would use for reference in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Civic Mobilization Case Study, Civil Society Observes Peru's Controversial 2000 Elections. Marica Vernbaum, Ph.D.2001 pg 27.

NDI transferred the necessary tools and techniques for monitoring elections and building an organization. NDI also helped promote the confidence of GONG leadership, which in turn fueled activism. This initial relationship helped lay a practical foundation for GONG's future development.

After the elections, the NDI/GONG relationship became less formal and less structured. GONG grew and matured as an organization and NDI's programming and initiatives in Croatia shifted. At the same time, however, NDI continued to provide support and guidance at GONG's request. In this way, NDI's assistance became tailored to GONG's specific needs and expectations.

"We engaged them in traditional trainings at first, but then let them try things and be on their own. We did help them figure out how and why things worked or didn't."

-Mike Marshall, former NDI Croatia field representative

GONG was written into NDI grants as an implementation partner, which allowed GONG the opportunity to learn from observing and modeling NDI's practices. In 2000, GONG received a sub-grant – supplying core operating costs – from NDI. This sub-grant was used as a capacity building tool as NDI held GONG accountable to international donor standards. By providing references and reassurances to the donor community on GONG's behalf, NDI became a liaison between GONG and the donor community.

The sub-grant mentioned above, which was part of NDI's parliamentary program, was also used to raise and broaden GONG's skill level and allow increased exposure to political leaders and public officials. NDI would invite GONG leaders to take part in workshops and discussions for members of parliament (MPs), journalists, and political parties. In addition, GONG staff members helped NDI facilitate different training activities. NDI also encouraged a relationship between GONG and the secretary general of the *Sabor*.

### ***Transparencia***

NDI has worked with *Transparencia* since its founding. In the run-up to the 1995 presidential election, NDI had two representatives working daily with *Transparencia* on various technical issues and organizational development. After the election, the relationship moved to a more informal relationship, but NDI and *Transparencia* still maintained close ties. NDI became a monitor of *Transparencia's* work with the donor community and at international conferences and workshops. NDI and *Transparencia* worked side-by-side to monitor Peru's 2000 presidential elections. Collaboration took the form of joint training sessions on a number of issues, these included: parallel vote tabulation (PVT) and other election monitoring issues; accounting practices; press releases; and internal communication. The NDI representatives also went to the field with *Transparencia* to assist with training field staff and setting up poll watching teams. Much of this training took the form of *Transparencia* staff implementing what they learned from NDI staff and NDI staff acting as advisor during the implementation period.



*Transparencia* is a leading member in NDI's Civic Network – a network of Latin American NGOs promoting citizen involvement and engagement. *Transparencia* has also taken the lead on the Lima Agreement, which established an informal Latin American regional network that monitors elections and exchanges information on areas of democratic development, including campaign finance reform, and strengthening political party development.

## **Findings**

Peter Drucker, a pioneer of modern management thinking, argued that it is important for NGOs to “do the right work” and “do the work right.” By adhering to these two principles, an NGO is better able to deliver quality programs and products, gain credibility and public trust, and be a model of democratic behavior. Doing the right work means having a clear and legitimate reason for existing. It also means taking consistent steps toward accomplishing a well-defined mission. By “doing the work right,” an organization is acting in an accountable, transparent and responsible manner. Furthermore, an organization is also carefully considering how things get done and then using the most effective and efficient means of achieving a mission.

GONG and *Transparencia* are self-sustaining NGOs that are doing the right work and the work right. How did this happen and what role did NDI play? All of the research respondents agreed that NDI did play an important role in the development of both organizations; although both groups undoubtedly would have continued organizing without any NDI assistance. The two groups had already made some decisions about the need to organize before NDI became directly involved. In other words, GONG and *Transparencia* had taken steps toward “doing the right work” in response to undemocratic Peruvian and Croatian political practices. Essentially, the two groups (or at least the future leaders of the groups) acknowledged a problem with the politics in their respective countries and made a choice to change the status quo. In these two cases, NDI had the opportunity to work with committed partners that could already answer the question, *why does your organization exist?*

The citizen participation team developed 11 hypotheses that guided the interview phase of this research project. The hypotheses generally reflected two underlying factors contributing to organizational success and sustainability: the leadership of the organizations and NDI's particular approach to providing technical assistance. Almost everyone interviewed underscored variations on these factors.

The leadership of the organizations determined the “right work” and NDI helped them do the “work right.” In many ways, the leadership ensured that NDI's assistance could be absorbed and used in a purposeful manner, because they understood the need for assistance. Though both groups knew what they wanted to accomplish, they did not have all the necessary capacity to make it happen. NDI was able to assist the groups with doing what they already intended to do better, particularly when it came to domestic election monitoring and building a sustainable organizational base. If, on the other hand, the groups had not had a clear idea about what they wanted to accomplish, NDI's job would have been much harder and the results much less impressive.

The results from the research are listed in the following table:

Technical Assistance “Do’s”	Technical Assistance “Don’ts”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>As the organization matures, change the nature of NDI’s assistance.</b> If steady progress is not being made by a group, reassess whether NDI’s assistance is appropriate and if the organization is really committed to improvement and sustainability.</li> <li>- <b>Be clear and consistent about your role as technical assistance provider.</b> NDI’s job is to help the organization become self-sustaining.</li> <li>- <b>Allow the organization to make mistakes,</b> as a way to improve its judgment and learn first-hand what works and what does not. At the same time, help it reflect on their experiences.</li> <li>- <b>Provide comparative information and feedback,</b> so that the organization can make informed decisions about what will work best for it.</li> <li>- <b>Keep the assistance practical and purposeful.</b> The organization should have appropriate expectations about what NDI will provide and when it will be provided. The assistance should be directly related to the real and recognized needs of the organization.</li> <li>- <b>Encourage longer-term strategic thinking on the part of the organization.</b> Help the organization make some decisions about when NDI’s assistance will no longer be needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Do not make decisions for the organization and do not do the work for it.</b> It needs to learn by doing and if it is reluctant to do the work, NDI should reconsider the relationship.</li> <li>- <b>Do not share an office with the local partner group,</b> because it becomes too hard to draw line between NDI’s work and that of the group.</li> <li>- <b>Do not give directives or treat the local organization as an NDI contract worker</b> and then expect it to be able to perform independent of NDI.</li> <li>- <b>Do not assume that the organization understands NDI’s role.</b> Develop written Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) that define NDI’s roles and responsibilities and those of the partner.</li> <li>- <b>Do not allow the organization to neglect its fundamental financial management and program reporting responsibilities when sub-grants are involved.</b> Sub-grants are a powerful way to help the organization learn by doing. However, if the group is not held to account and not taught early on that financial relationships come with certain obligations and responsibilities, it will more than likely develop unsustainable organizational practices.</li> <li>- <b>Do not put an organization’s programming before its organizational health and welfare.</b></li> </ul>

<p>- <b>Use NDI’s position and relationships to help the organization develop networks</b> with political leaders, public official, donors and other NGOs.</p>	
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When discussing GONG and *Transparencia*’s need for assistance, it is not to say that the groups were initially devoid of any organizational skills or know-how. In addition to the leadership capacity of both groups, they also possessed a range of organizing abilities. For example, they had politically sophisticated and experienced activists, existing relationships with other groups and political institutions, and a high level of energy and creativity. NDI helped them harness all of their abilities and focus them on a certain type of organizing that was new to them.

The internal capacity of both organizations to sustain changes in leadership should be noted. Many organizations collapse or fail to make significant impact after leadership changes. This did not happen with GONG or *Transparencia*. The power transfer in both organizations did not hinder continued growth.

NDI President Ken Wollack described the keys to the success of both organizations: “... These organizations started with a handful of people that understood the mission and that were committed and dedicated. They understood the mission and built the organization around it ... They had directors that were very dynamic and charismatic. They were fearless and cutting edge which allowed them to push the envelope all the time.” NDI concurrently provided the groups with the tools, techniques and experiences necessary to push confidently, sensibly and always deliberately.

NDI’s approach to working with both the groups can be characterized as a form of stewardship. This approach, along with each organization’s leadership, appears to have stimulated growth and an internal “can-do” attitude within the groups.

“Democracy is difficult to plant, to sow ... By training GONG, NDI has played the important role of gardener, to plant the seeds and ensure that democracy will flourish.”

- Zoran Pusic, founder and former president of GONG

As a steward, NDI did not make decisions for the organizations, implement their programs or take a direct hand in the management of either group. Instead, NDI assisted the organizations with developing fundamental organizational competencies through various training sessions and consultations at the outset. Much of this was based on each organization’s planned monitoring activities. Topics during the early period of assistance included program planning, financial management, reporting, and communications. In each case, NDI provided substantial training and advice at the outset and then backed off as the organizations became capable of putting the tools and techniques into action as part of their programming efforts. In other words, NDI’s assistance changed over time as the organizations developed and matured; early training activities that helped the groups get off the ground made way for more consultative assistance. During this later period, NDI

representatives guided the groups through such processes as strategic planning, proposal writing, developing internal policies and procedures, and annual budgeting.

NDI's modes of assistance:

- Training sessions covering such topics as how to write a press release, how to observe an election, and how to create an accounting spreadsheet.
- Providing feedback, when asked, to partner organizations on activities, policies, partnerships and other organizational related topics. This should be done in a consultative manner.
- Providing comparative information on different topics, such as organizational structure, NGO codes of conduct, and grant proposals.
- Assisting with networking in the NGO community. This can take the form of inviting partner organization leaders to networking events and functions as well as including them in trainings.
- Advocating in the donor community by being a reference, ensuring competence, and taking all opportunities to mention the organizations to donors.
- Modeling appropriate behavior. When NDI practices what it preaches, organizations are able to follow the example.

Instead of viewing the relationship with the groups as static and indefinite, NDI representatives purposefully sought to raise the organizations up to a level where they no longer required direct NDI assistance. As time passed, NDI only provided assistance when the organizations approached and requested specific help. This is an indication that the organizations had developed a capacity to determine their own needs and to determine when NDI might be able to meet those needs.

Throughout this process, NDI allowed the leaders of GONG and *Transparencia* to make their own decisions and occasional mistakes. At each turn, however, NDI was there to offer advice and guidance, and to help the groups reflect on mishaps, as a means of learning and developing each organization's ability to constantly assess and improve.

Although money was not a determining factor in the partnership, GONG did point out that one of the most important contributions NDI made was providing a sub-grant in 2000 that covered operating costs, such as salaries, rent, and electricity. With concerns on short-term existence eliminated, GONG's time, energy, and creativity was directed into the development of activities and the organization itself, which paid dividends in the long-run.

Financial support did not play a dominant role in the relationship between NDI and the groups. Although both received sub-grants, the groups did not appear to view NDI as just a funder. On the contrary, they viewed NDI as a resource for technical assistance. The fact that money was not a critical issue, and that the groups appreciated NDI for the technical assistance, contributed to making the relationships work.

Challenges arose during the course of both partnerships, however. The lesson learned the interviewees brought up the most concerns NDI's early relationship with *Transparencia*. NDI sent two resident representatives to work with *Transparencia* on technical issues. They worked daily, hand-in-hand with the staff in the *Transparencia* office and in the field. Problems began to arise, however, because the roles of NDI and *Transparencia* were never defined from the outset; a memorandum of understanding (MOU) had not been created to define the relationship. Questions emerged as to whether the resident representatives worked for NDI or for *Transparencia*, and whether their job was to provide training and technical assistance or to provide oversight. This problem caused friction and tension for a period of time until a series of discussions helped resolve the issue by explicitly defining roles. However, if roles had been defined from the beginning, with an MOU for example, these tensions would not have arisen.

Recently, GONG also raised a concern about NDI recruiting GONG staff members to work for the Institute as resident representatives in other countries. GONG raised this issue to notify NDI that, as an organization, it faces a human resource challenge when skilled and experienced staff members leave.

Overall, however, NDI's relationship with both groups has been positive and mutually beneficial over the years. By being clear and consistent about NDI roles and by not giving directives to the organizations, NDI showed respect for the two groups which helped to build trust and long-lasting partnerships.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Below are conclusions and recommendations based on the research findings, as well as answers to the interview question: *What advice would you give NDI when working with local NGOs?*

This information is presented specifically for NDI's program staff members, working with local organizations.

- **An organization that already has leaders with ideas about what they want the organization to do or to be, makes it easier for NDI to provide targeted**

“There is an inherent ambiguity in the role of an NDI representative. They are advisors and often become very close friends with members of these groups. However, they check on the work in order to be able to vouch for the group to their own funders or potential funders for the group. In some cases, they are providing funding and are responsible for overseeing the management of NDI monies. Due to these facts, there is always potential for friction between group members and NDI staff. Some NGO members can be suspicious; in only a few cases have they become resentful. Problems around the dual nature of a field rep's roles can only be managed well in situations where there is periodic, open communication and an acknowledgement of the dual nature of the representative's role. Some of this, but not all, can be taken care of in a memorandum of understanding.”

-Melissa Estok- former NDI field representative who worked with *Transparencia*

**technical assistance.** It would be nearly impossible for NDI to effectively support the sustained growth of an organization that does not have the pre-existing leadership “raw material.”

- **Find out what the organization wants to change.** When creating a program with the organization, start with the end in mind. Discuss with the organization where it wants to be or what it wants to accomplish and create an assistance program that will help take it to that destination. NDI assistance should be purposeful (goal-oriented) and practical (meeting the real and recognized needs of the group).
- **Make sure that the organization’s goals and objectives are complementary to NDI’s, in that there is a clear political activism orientation.** NDI is not well-suited to helping NGOs that are only interested in service provision or social activities, since NDI adds the most value to organizations working on democratic reforms or trying to be otherwise politically engaged.

**Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)** are used to clarify and confirm the obligations and expectations between NDI and partner groups. An MOU can accomplish two important objectives: it reflects a partner group’s political will to engage in specified types of organizational development and programmatic activities (e.g., developing a strategic plan, improving organizational management and recruiting more volunteers); it articulates the level and type of support NDI will provide the groups for their organizational development and program effort (e.g., NDI will assign a full-time representative with organizing and non-profit management experience to provide advice and a series of regular training sessions on certain topics for 12 months).
- **Both NDI and the partner organization need jointly defined and understood roles, responsibilities, objectives, and expected outcomes when working together.** An MOU is one way to outline and formalize this information and relationship.
- **Allow an organization to make mistakes and to take responsibility for its own growth.** Remember, it is not NDI’s organization. In most places, individuals and organizations are accustomed to top-down authority. Do not reinforce this condition by dictating to a local group. Help groups become independent, as well as active.
- **From the beginning, think about how the relationship between NDI (technical assistance provider) and the local NGO (recipient of assistance) will progress and eventually end.** There should be an explicit strategy for developing the local organization to the point where NDI is no longer needed for help.
- **Be a model of organizational best practices.** By being well-organized, punctual, inclusive, accountable, responsible, open, etc., local groups will have a better understanding about what these principles mean in practice.

- **Training alone has a limited role in helping partner a NGO turn into a high performing organization.** Training can get a group pointed in the right direction, but real learning and institutionalization will come through actually putting into practice what it has learned and reflecting on experiences.
- **Sub-grants – combined with training activities and consultations — can be used as technical assistance tools** that help a local organization improve its ability to run programs, interact with funders, report programmatic results and manage money, to name a few capacity areas. Sub-grants can also provide funding for core expenses, such as rent and utilities, freeing up the organization to devote time to programs and building capacity.
- **Do not protect organizations from problematic situations or particular challenges, as these are valuable educational opportunities.**
- **Set realistic standards and create reasonable expectations when working with different organizations.** Standards aren't the same around the world and organizations differ in levels of maturity, sophistication, and capacity.
- **Be a champion for organizations that have the tools, skills, and staff to take off.** Advocate for them with foreign donors, be a reference for them, and advocate on their behalf. Many donors won't fund indigenous organizations without recommendations.
- **Work with organizations to develop democratic and functional statutes that encourage open participation.**
- **Increase efforts to capture techniques and resources created and used with local partners.**
- **And lastly, look to GONG and *Transparencia* as examples!**

### Hypotheses for Success

Both GONG and Transparencia are highly respected and leading NGOs. We have researched reports, web-sites, and books to try and discover the causes of their success and to what degree the relationship with NDI contributed. Below are what we believe to be the factors to the success of the organizations and how the relationship with NDI played a role.

- The founders truly wanted their NGO to succeed, to create positive change in their country, and put the organization above themselves. They were and are innovative, have and had strong visions of what their organizations could become and the foresight to put in place mechanisms to achieve these visions.
- The staff is highly professional, enthusiastic, dedicated, and loyal to their organizations.
- The organizations probably would have achieved a certain level of success without NDI.
- The domestic situations at the time of their inception were very receptive to organizations doing work in their field.
- There was, and always has been, mutual respect between the organizations and NDI which has been the foundation of an open and trusting relationship.
- By being with the organizations at their inception, NDI was able to work with them on forming a solid organizational foundation based on best practices and lessons learned from the beginning. The organizations didn't need to forget what was previously done and implement new practices.
- By using NDI as a sounding board and consultant, and NDI being open to this type of relationship, the organizations were able to make their own mistakes, learn from them, work as a team, grow as a team, and build trust in each other, etc.
- By NDI not giving financial support, suggestions were not perceived as mandates, but as advice. This created trust, respect, and much more receptiveness.
- The organizations realization that trainings were needed, where they were needed, and asking for them facilitated growth and an ability to identify their strengths and weaknesses.
- The personal relationships between NDI staff and the organization's staff created trust and openness which allowed for unbiased questions and answers. These have transcended from personal relationships to institution to institution relationships.
- NDI's assisting in creating linkages with government agencies, international bodies, other NGOs and the organizations ability to maintain the external partnerships created opportunities for growth.



### **Questions for GONG**

1. What have been the keys to GONG's success?

2. To what extent has the personalities, dedication and relationships of GONG's staff been a factor to its success?
3. To what degree was the domestic environment at the time of your inception a contributor to your success?
4. How was the NDI/GONG relationship defined at the onset? Did it change over time? If so how and was it the way that you wanted it to? How did NDI treat your organization throughout the relationship?
5. How did the openness and trust between GONG and NDI come about? Was this a contributing factor to your success?
6. Over the years, GONG received various types of funding from NDI, were there any that were more useful than others?
7. What role did NDI play in the GONG's organizational structure, organizational management, and overall development?
8. How effective was the technical assistance provided by NDI?
9. What types other of trainings and/or projects would you have like to have been a part of?
10. What projects that you worked on with NDI were valuable to your success?
11. How have the exchanges that you participated in, as hosts and participants, contributed to your success?
12. GONG has gone through some structural and organizational changes, expanded its programming, and increased its international exposure in recent years. How has NDI been there to support you?
13. What did you gain the most from working with NDI?
14. What were key moments your relationship with NDI?
15. What were the challenges in working with NDI?
16. What would you done differently if you didn't have a relationship with NDI?
17. What advice can you give to us on working with other organizations?

#### **Questions for GONG-NDI staff**

1. What have been the keys to GONG's success?

2. To what extent has the personalities, dedication and relationships of GONG's founders and staff contributed to its success?
3. To what degree was the domestic environment at the time of their inception a contributor to their success?
4. How was the NDI/GONG relationship defined at the onset? Did it change over time? If so, how and was it the way that you wanted it to?
5. How did the openness and trust between GONG and NDI come about? Was this a contributing factor?
6. GONG received various types of funding from NDI, were there any that were more useful than others?
7. How was the relationship different when GONG was receiving funding directly from NDI and when it wasn't?
8. What role did NDI play in GONG's organizational structure, organizational management, and overall organizational development?
9. How affective was the technical assistance provided by NDI?
10. What other types of trainings and/or projects would have been beneficial?
11. What projects that NDI and GONG worked on together contributed to their success?
12. How have the exchanges that they participated in, as hosts and participants, contributed to their success?
13. GONG has gone through some structural and organizational changes, has expanded its programming, and increased its international exposure. How has NDI supported this?
14. What were key moments the relationship?
15. How has GONG differed from other organizations that you have worked with and is that a factor in their success?
16. How was NDI able to have a two pronged approach: hands-off, allowing them to figure things out on their own, yet able to work with them organizational development and technical training?
17. What advice would you give to us on working with other organizations?

### **Questions for Transparencia**

1. Transparencia is now one of the most respected Democracy building NGOs in Latin America, what have been the keys to its success?
2. To what extent has the personalities, dedication and relationships of the founders and staff been a factor in the success of Transparencia?
3. To what degree was the domestic environment at the time of your inception a contributor to your success?
4. How was the NDI/Transparencia relationship defined at the onset? Did it change over time? If so, how and was it the way that you wanted it to? How did NDI treat your organization throughout the relationship?
5. How did the openness and trust between Transparencia and NDI come about? Was this a contributing factor to your success?
6. How was the relationship different when you were receiving funding directly from NDI and when you weren't?
7. What role did NDI play in Transparencia's organizational structure, organizational management, and overall development?
8. How effective was the technical assistance provided by NDI?
9. What other types of trainings and/or projects would you have liked to have been a part of?
10. What projects that you worked on with NDI were valuable to your success?
11. How have the exchanges that you participated in, as hosts and participants, contributed to your success?
12. Over the years, Transparencia has added programming and its scope of international exposure, how has NDI been there to support you in these endeavors?
13. What did you gain the most from working with NDI?
14. What were key moments your relationship with NDI?
15. What were the challenges in working with NDI?
16. What would you have done differently if you didn't have a relationship with NDI?
17. What advice would you give to us on working with other organizations

### **Questions for Transparencia-NDI staff**

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16. What advice would you give to us on working with other organizations?