

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE: COTE D'IVOIRE 2010-2015

Cumulative Assessment of NDI Programs in Cote d'Ivoire

Funded by the National Endowment for Democracy:

Promoting Participatory and Peaceful Elections: 2010-321D

Promoting National Reconciliation and Political Reform: 2011-239V

Fostering Dialogue and Inclusive Political Processes: 2012-283BB

Stimulating Dialogue and Youth Engagement in National Reconciliation: 2013-020B

**Innovative Approaches to Enhancing Prospects for Peaceful and Inclusive Elections
Through Citizen Engagement: 2014-008B**

Supporting Peaceful Elections Through an Anti-Violence Campaign: 2015-013CC

I. STRATEGY AND CONTEXT

Rapid political evolutions in Côte d'Ivoire, including violence after the contested 2010 presidential election and stop-and-go attempts at dialogue and reconciliation, required NDI to adjust its strategy several times over the course of the period being assessed. After the long crisis and violence, however, democracy assistance in Côte d'Ivoire suffered from donor fatigue for most of the assessment period. Maintaining an in-country presence to support reconciliation efforts and pave the way for peaceful elections in 2015 was an NDI strategic choice made possible only due to NED support. As part of this assessment, NDI sought to examine how its emphasis on maintaining a ground presence in Côte d'Ivoire affected partner relationships and NDI's ability to achieve its goals.

The assessment found that maintaining this uninterrupted presence was essential to the successes achieved by the program. It allowed NDI to re-build partnerships with Ivorian political and civic groups, particularly with supporters of former president Gbagbo, who had become suspicious of international assistance (including from NDI) following the role played by the international community in the 2010 election and its aftermath. Partners emphasized the importance of these relationships and NDI's in-country presence when discussing the Institute's facilitation of interparty dialogue and supporting the emergence of a nonpartisan civil society. The assessment also found that NDI's ability to make strategic shifts depended largely on its ground presence, which provided the Institute with timely access to partners and an early understanding of changes in the country's evolving democracy assistance needs. A notable example of this was a timely pre-election assessment in 2013 that led to consensual changes in the country's electoral framework.

The Institute's programming strategy sought to exploit windows of opportunity and to leverage progress made with partners to further reconciliation and democratic strengthening in Côte d'Ivoire. This included activities to support the 2010 election, the Truth, Dialogue and Reconciliation process, and augment women's political participation. While executed successfully, these programs did not directly facilitate major breakthroughs.

Midway through its 2013 program, NDI became aware of deep divisions and reservations regarding the electoral framework. Realizing these concerns threatened the inclusiveness and legitimacy of the next election as well as reconciliation efforts, the Institute obtained supplemental NED funding to advance electoral reform through inclusive dialogue. This

initiative marked a shift in NDI's Côte d'Ivoire strategy from assisting political parties, marginalized groups and reconciliation efforts to electoral support. It led to opposition participation in the presidential election (see Outcomes, below) and helped create a political environment conducive to electoral support activities. The Institute built on this success with programs designed to expand civic participation in the electoral process through a variety of non-partisan activities. NDI's 2014 program began cultivating the emergence of a professional, non-partisan domestic election monitoring platform. With USAID assistance, this group conducted a parallel vote tabulation (PVT) of the 2015 election.

II. OUTCOMES

The assessment examined program outcomes¹ in five thematic areas encompassing the 12 different objectives of the six programs under review:

- Preventing or mitigating election-related conflict;
- Enhancing political participation of women and youth;
- Fostering social and political reconciliation;
- Strengthening electoral processes; and
- Strengthening civil society.

Using qualitative, interactive assessment methods, NDI analyzed participant, beneficiary and staff statements on: *what changes had taken place* (or not) in areas of inquiry; *the nature and degree of NDI contribution's* to these changes; and *the role played by NDI's in-country presence and partner relationships*. Participants assessed degrees of contribution using a qualitative scale:

- *directly attributable*;
- *essential*;
- *major*;
- *significant*;
- *minor*;
- *none*; and
- *negative*.²

In response to participant feedback, some statements received an additional qualification of *insufficient*, used to acknowledge the reality of the contribution along with a degree of dissatisfaction or incompleteness. The four most significant outcomes identified through the assessment are discussed below. Because impact from NDI's work enhancing political participation by women and youth was more limited, it is discussed under Lessons Learned.

A. *Electoral Processes Are More Inclusive, Transparent and Free*

The most significant recent advances in Côte d'Ivoire's democratic development have been a more open and inclusive management of the electoral system and a growing confidence in the electoral process among political parties and an historically skeptical public. After the 2010 election, the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) still contained representatives of disbanded former rebel movements on its board. Other key points of contention included the accuracy and completeness of the voter registry and public financing for political parties.

¹ For the specific evaluation questions, please see Annex F, Scope of Work.

² When used in the text to describe a measurement of contribution to change, these terms are *italicized*. Their use is described more fully in Annex B, Methodological Note.

Lacking confidence in how elections would be run, opposition parties had boycotted the legislative elections in 2011 and local elections in 2013. This represented a significant step backward from the 2010 election in which, for the first time, the country's three major parties all ran presidential candidates.

To respond to concerns about a boycott of the 2015 presidential election that could have further undermined public confidence in elections and led to widespread violence, NDI deployed a high-level pre-election mission, co-led by former Canadian Prime Minister Joe Clark and former Ambassador Brian Atwood. The mission met with stakeholders across the political spectrum and provided recommendations for electoral reform. Chief among these was restructuring the composition of the CEI to enhance confidence in its ability to conduct a neutral poll. The mission suggested a board with balanced representation from four groups (ruling and opposition coalitions, technical government bureaus and civil society); this suggestion formed the basis for reform that eventually passed.

NDI's NED-funded programming made a *major* contribution to this change. The restructuring of the CEI in a manner that was accepted by all except the most radical opposition is widely credited to NDI's assistance. When asked to name significant democratic changes, those cited most often by NDI's Ivoirian partners were this reform and the peaceful 2015 election. Many participants indicated that the change could not have taken place without NDI's efforts, in particular the pre-election mission. One senior political party official maintained that NDI's program was "70 percent responsible" for the reform. Nevertheless, a top government official indicated that NDI's assistance approach—as contrasted with diplomatic efforts—allowed Ivoirians to take ownership of the change, and thereby facilitated it. This reform of the CEI was a breakthrough that made a number of other outcomes from NDI's NED (and later USAID)-funded programs possible.

B. Civil Society Has Gained Credibility, Stakeholder Confidence and Power

Another important change is the emergence of a nonpartisan civil society able to influence public opinion and events. During the time of NDI's pre-election mission, stakeholders from both the ruling coalition and the opposition dismissed the importance of civil society. They were described as "wolves in sheep's clothing," because political actors perceived civil society organizations (CSOs) as acting on behalf of political interests. Polarization and mistrust had hampered civil society efforts to work in a nonpartisan fashion for a long time, and CSOs had reinforced this perception by their own actions; in 2010 CSOs monitoring the presidential runoff issued contradictory statements regarding who had won the election.

The same political actors now welcome the election monitoring and support efforts of NDI partner, the Platform of Civil Society Organizations for Observation of Elections in Côte d'Ivoire (POECI). POECI's work, such as the PVT it conducted in 2015, are appreciated across the political spectrum and by institutions such as the CEI. One majority party representative said, "Before, CSOs were covers covers used by political actors; now it's turning into a true civil society." The opposition stated that "Civil society is becoming a credible partner," and, "In 2015 civil society really fulfilled its role. Bravo!" Another political actor described the change this way: "There are now three powers at work: the parties in power, the opposition and civil society."

NDI's 2014 program sought to assist Ivoirian civil society build a nonpartisan approach that would earn it the credibility needed to help shape events. To overcome polarization, mistrust and competitive pressures within the civil society sector, the Institute planned to leverage the power of advanced election monitoring methods that empower observers to detect tampering with results and verify their accuracy. Since the 2010 post-election violence was predicated on a dispute over the credibility of election results, this approach resonated with CSO partners regardless of political orientations. Advanced methods that can confer this capability, however, require a centralized data reporting structure, standardized training and effective coordination among observer groups. Ivoirian CSOs could only obtain these capacities by working better together, and could only gain credibility by including diverse political perspectives in the effort.

With NED support, NDI introduced the power and the challenges of systematic election observation using advanced methods to CSO partners. Through participation in a series of consultations, conferences and strategy sessions, CSOs developed a memorandum of understanding to guide their work together on election monitoring while gaining technical knowledge needed for the effort. As NDI was implementing this program, USAID provided funding to augment and continue the Institute's work with its CSO partners, including monitoring the 2015 and 2016 elections. The partners, now known as POECI, conducted a PVT for the presidential election, which eventually confirmed the election results. However, before results had been announced, tensions rose as different parties sought to characterize the turnout as high or low. When an incorrect figure, attributed to the CEI, appeared in the media, POECI was able to calm suspicions by providing a (different) estimate of the correct turnout rate, which was eventually confirmed by the final results. The outcome of these events was confidence across the political spectrum in POECI's capacity, not only technically, but as a credible nonpartisan actor. This development provides a new, stabilizing counterweight to political actors' efforts to spin public perception of elections.

NDI's contribution was a *major* factor in this change. The CSO partners validate NDI's approach of leveraging the power of advanced methodologies to facilitate a more coordinated and nonpartisan monitoring effort. "The new methods led civil society to evolve," one representative said, and "gain credibility." The partners recognize that their work has led to other stakeholders and the general public better appreciating the positive contributions civil society can make, and has positioned it to better fulfill an oversight role. Partners and other stakeholders alike credit NDI with catalyzing or inspiring POECI's work. POECI members add that NDI's contribution was a *major* factor due to the ongoing assistance provided by NDI staff on the ground in terms of technical support, troubleshooting and guidance when making important decisions.

C. Dialogue Between Parties and Party Representatives Takes Place More Frequently and Easily

In the aftermath of the 2010 election, interparty dialogue was absent between supporters of President Ouattara's new regime and those who supported Laurent Gbagbo, particularly members of his party, the Ivoirian Popular Front (FPI). Many FPI leaders were in jail; others left the FPI to form new parties but remained hesitant to engage with the government. By the time of the cumulative assessment, dialogue was occasionally taking place between the ruling and opposition parties without international assistance, including at the leadership level. This change

has not proceeded in a linear fashion, however, and NDI's contributions in this area are still valued by its political partners.

While important progress has been made in the area of political dialogue and reconciliation since 2010, it has not resolved many underlying issues. As a consequence, most participants or beneficiaries regard work in this area as incomplete. Perspectives on reconciliation tend to reflect political alignments, with opposition supporters expressing dissatisfaction and members of the ruling coalition maintaining that political adversaries want to block progress on reconciliation in order to gain leverage for negotiation. Civil society tends to hold a position accepted by many, that Côte d'Ivoire is "generally peaceful [at present] but at risk of conflict."

Despite differences over progress on reconciliation, dialogue between parties and party representatives takes place more frequently and easily. NDI played a *significant* role in these advances, with parties sometimes qualifying NDI's contribution as *major*. As one top government official explained, "People weren't speaking to each other, but NDI through its seminars succeeded in creating a framework for bringing them together physically, and also their different ideas on reconciliation and democratic consolidation." NDI's support on the margins of the Permanent Framework for Dialogue (CPD)³ was mentioned by both sides as important to restarting policy discussions after the traumatic events of 2010. That support resulted in draft legislation on political party finance and an official status of the opposition. A FPI leader echoed these sentiments, "At times, everything [in terms of dialogue] was just broken down, difficult to approach one another but NDI gave political actors a framework for friendly exchanges. At first it was uncertain, but eventually a sense of humanism and brotherhood returned."

D. Election-Related Violence, Including Provocative Behavior Such As Hate Speech, Reduced

NDI's Ivoirian partners clearly perceive that election-related violence diminished and was increasingly mitigated from 2010 to 2016, and that NDI's programs played a meaningful role in this change. Because the risks and types of conflict observed around the 2010 election were quite different from those around later polls, and NDI used multiple approaches to prevent or mitigate political conflict, it is difficult to measure this change or to attribute it to specific interventions. Impact is illustrated by anecdotes, such as one that described NDI program participants coming to each other's aid without regard for party affiliation during the dangerous period following the 2010 election; others mentioned a reduction in hate speech when peace campaign activists engaged on-line communities, using facts and questions to defuse exchanges of inflammatory rhetoric. The role of NDI's assistance to these outcomes was judged *significant* by participants.

NDI's most important contribution in this area, however, was brokering the Code of Good Conduct for political parties during elections, and assisting the Code of Conduct Observatory to monitor compliance with it. In 2015, using USAID funding, NDI brokered renewed commitments to the Code. Some partners note that the Code, first negotiated and signed in 2008

³ The Permanent Framework for Dialogue is a structure created in April 2012 that brought together high-level government representatives and 11 opposition parties composed of former Gbagbo allies. The FPI was not a member of the CPD but did participate as an observer at NDI activities with the CPD.

with the Institute's assistance, and supported through 2010 under NED grants, did not prevent the post-election conflict in 2010. The same partners, however, report that the use of inflammatory campaign language and state resources by candidates and party cadres has since diminished. The work of the Code of Conduct Observatory (a civil society monitoring network) is highly appreciated for its neutrality and considered an essential aspect of the code's effectiveness. The Observatory's willingness to factually relate violations by all parties is what gives parties confidence in the Code – a similarly effective monitoring entity did not exist in 2010. Notably, in 2015 parties chose to make the Observatory, rather than the CEI, responsible for sanctioning violations by publicly identifying them. Parties expressed satisfaction with this approach and continue to support it.

Participants described NDI's contribution to the reduction in election-related violence as highly *significant*, and some qualified it as a *major* or even *essential* contribution. In terms of impact, NDI's work on the Code of Conduct would thus rank closely behind its assistance enhancing the inclusivity and transparency of elections, and the professionalization of civil society in Côte d'Ivoire. Members of the Observatoire noted that NDI's technical assistance directly contributed to its ability to *project* neutrality, beyond merely being even-handed in its investigation and evaluation of complaints. The consultations and coaching provided by NDI staff on the ground motivated changes in behavior that do not come naturally without this kind of sustained support.

III. LOCAL PARTNERS & SUBGRANTEES

For most of NDI's work in Côte d'Ivoire its local partners have been political parties or structures or individuals in some way affiliated with the political parties, such as youth or women party activists. These partners have advanced interparty dialogue and electoral reforms while building individual members' skills and capacities. The number of party partners has fluctuated according to political developments. NDI's civil society partnerships have focused on monitoring the Code of Conduct or election processes. The Observatoire, which monitors compliance with the Code, has seen parties' and stakeholders' confidence in it grow, exemplified by their request that it publicize violations confirmed by its observers. NDI's domestic observation partner POECI is comprised of 10 civil society members, including the Group of Ivoirian Human Rights Actors (RAIDH) as well as members drawn from labor and women's movements, technology activists and religious leaders. NDI has also partnered with the Côte d'Ivoire branch of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) as part of its NED activities.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED

A. Long-Term Relationships and Ground Presence are Valuable Assets for Overcoming Barriers to Interparty Dialogue

While the political parties all pointed to NDI's 2013 pre-election assessment as a pivotal event, their openness with the assessment team and faith in its conclusions rested largely on the confidence they had in NDI's understanding of Côte d'Ivoire, the country's particular political history and its challenges. Even NDI workshops that were not directly aiming to advance interparty dialogue were valued because they laid the groundwork for future dialogue by bringing parties into informal contact with one another. "Having people in the same room, at the same table—this physical convergence tends toward a convergence of ideas." NDI's role

assisting the government and opposition parties discuss the issues of public financing for political parties and official status for the opposition—even though the draft legislation stalled—was referenced as paving the way for later talks. Also, the experience of discussing such issues with expert NDI staff allowed parties to have confidence in NDI’s approach when it came to the important matters addressed by the assessment team.

B. Seize Unexpected Opportunities for Timely, High-Impact Activities

The 2013 assessment mission ultimately benefited multiple NDI programs in Côte d’Ivoire. The mission’s report and the subsequent reform of the CEI greatly improved the programming environment as NDI shifted its focus to supporting civil society and domestic election monitoring. The more participatory approach to election management encouraged the greater collaboration among CSOs that NDI was trying to foster at the time. Likewise, it thawed political tensions enough for political parties to update the Code of Conduct and strengthen the Observatoire, both products of earlier NED programming. The mission’s report also helped revive discussions on political party finance measures, a topic on which NDI had previously provided NED-supported technical assistance.

C. Better Mitigate Risks and Enhance Sustainability of Capacity-Building Programs

During the five-year period being assessed, NDI also built skills and capacity for a variety of partners, including potential women candidates, youth, CSOs and local partners working on post-conflict reconciliation. While NDI’s programs generally achieved or made strong progress towards specific objectives, their broader impact was more limited: Côte d’Ivoire still lags behind other countries for women in elected office, for example, and progress on national reconciliation has been limited. The obstacles to moving from enhanced capacity to impact in Côte d’Ivoire often arise at the level of political developments or the “stickiness” of political institutions.⁴ For example, delays in organizing local elections, and opaque negotiations between parties on whether to run coalition slates, left potential candidates in all parties—including women trained with NDI assistance—in the dark about parties’ candidate selection processes. Advocacy training can help participants obtain support from individuals and even leaders, but institutional change often takes longer and requires additional skills and support. Participants clearly valued the skills they had gained, but lamented NDI’s inability to provide longer-term assistance or help them overcome challenges of institutional culture or political will.

Unforeseen risks often become apparent during implementation. NDI’s capacity-building programs in Côte d’Ivoire should plan to re-assess risks and sustainability at program startup and midpoint, with an emphasis on obstacles participants will face in putting new capacities to use. This could include budgeting mid-term sessions with partners to specifically identify and address unforeseen barriers to the sustainability. Programs can also incorporate modules to better prepare participants to understand, for example, the difference between raising awareness and effecting institutional change.

APPENDICES

- A. Evaluation Plans
- B. Methodological Note
- C. Funding for NDI Program in Côte d’Ivoire, 2010 – 2016
- D. Complete List of Outcomes and Changes
- E. Timeline of Major Political and Programmatic Developments

⁴ “Stickiness” is a concept used by political scientists to describe institutional resistance to change, despite the existence of powerful motives or forces in favor of change. See, e.g., Güven, A.B., “Reforming Sticky Institutions: Persistence and Change in Turkish Agriculture,” *Studies in Comparative International Development*, (2009) 44:162.

F. Scope of Work