

**“Achieving Sustainable Political Change in Emerging Democracies:
The Political Party Challenge”**

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Comments by Kenneth Wollack, President of NDI

I, too, at the outset want to reiterate what others before me have said by thanking Wilton Park, the Westminster Foundation, and Tom Carothers for organizing such a thoughtful and thought provoking event with interesting people on a topic that couldn't be more timely.

It is particularly gratifying to be participating in a gathering that is not Iraq-specific. It is as if Iraq has sucked the political oxygen out of the air and it is refreshing to turn, albeit briefly, to other subjects.

After yesterday's speeches and interventions, which were so pointed and comprehensive, I was becoming fearful that we were coming early to that point of any three-day conference at which everything had been said -- but not by everyone. I will try therefore to do my best to add new issues and perhaps different perspectives to a very complex set of issues.

I want to thank Tom Carothers again for putting so much information on this table and as always raising provocative issues that help those of us, for lack of a better term, democracy practitioners, think harder and more critically about the things we do. We are better organizations because of Tom's efforts.

At the outset, Tom, I think, brought us together on three important points. First, the centrality of political parties to democratic systems, with their unique role of aggregating and representing citizens' interests. Second, the need for the international community, including donor aid agencies and international financial institutions, to “get over” its aversion to parties and to balance or recalibrate its assistance programs to include, in one form or another, directly or indirectly, political parties. This process is beginning to

happen with organizations like UNDP, the World Bank, and the OAS. And third, the sorry state that political parties find themselves in, whether in new or traditional democracies.

Now, with these areas of apparent agreement, we come to the really hard part. How do we, individually and collectively, contribute in an appropriate and effective way to political parties: 1) who do we support? and 2) how do we support them?

I believe the challenge for all of us engaged in this effort is to constantly balance our time and approaches -- to step back as Tom would suggest by asking the big questions and searching for relevant models while, at the same time, not allowing the asking and searching to become a prescription for inaction. Tom rightly warns of the risk of wasting money, and we must also guard against the risk of over planning, thereby losing opportunities or creating mechanical approaches and artificial templates that are doomed to fail. (Here, I am reminded of the ad business axiom that "50 percent of advertising is wasted...but nobody knows which 50 percent." The same rule of thumb may also apply to party assistance.)

This risk of over planning will become even greater when and if party assistance no longer becomes what Tom called a "reserved corner" of democracy aid but is mainstreamed by governments, intergovernmental organizations and financial institutions. Party assistance by its very nature should have a political edge if it is to be seen as relevant to the parties themselves. I believe we must also strive for balance between being informed by experience, both the successes and the failures, and willing to experiment with new approaches. My first question was, who do you work with? The process of choosing itself creates a sense of unease. We run the risk of being accused of meddling.

I like to believe that the following examples were consensus choices and would have been made by most of the groups represented around this table. Certainly decisions were reached in agreement with our primary funders, USAID and NED.

Different Approaches in Supporting Political Parties

The following seven choices made by NDI cover a wide range of situations.

1. *Working with only a single party:* In a few situations it was found that the only way to promote peace and democracy was through programs that assisted a single party. In Northern Ireland in the mid-1980s, the SDLP was the only party in the nationalist community committed to a peaceful and constitutional resolution to the sectarian conflict. The party, which grew out of the civil rights movement, desperately needed help to compete with the political arm of the IRA. Other examples in the mid-1980s included the DPP in Taiwan during martial law, the NKDP in South Korea, and currently the NLD in Burma.
2. *Coalition of democratic parties facing autocratic forces:* In countries such as Panama and Chile in the late 1980s it was necessary to work in partnership with the democratic political forces that coalesced to confront autocratic regimes. More recently, similar programs were carried out in Niger, Croatia, Serbia and Belarus.
3. *Reform oriented or multiethnic parties:* In order to promote a more genuine multiparty environment it has been necessary to work principally, but not necessarily exclusively, with reform oriented or multiethnic parties that have been severely disadvantaged by a restricted political environment and are struggling to gain a foothold in the political process. Russia, Iraq, Ukraine and Bosnia are examples of such places.

4. *Ruling and opposition parties -- excluding extremists:* Working with political parties in government and opposition is a way of strengthening the democratic process and nurturing reform initiatives while excluding the more extremist groups that seek to undermine these reform efforts. Georgia and Romania are current examples of this practice.

5. *All viable political parties:* There are many examples of programs in democratic settings where all of the main political parties participate. While the program content may vary for each party, their participation is a collaborative effort and sends a strong positive message to the domestic and international communities. In recent years, such programs have been conducted in most Latin America countries, Indonesia, Mozambique, Morocco and Bangladesh.

6. *Parties that have never participated in the democratic process:* While these types of political environments are becoming less common, there were instances in Eastern Europe countries (1989, 1990) and South Africa (1994) where new or previously banned parties had never engaged in the electoral process. Assistance was necessary to help level the playing field.

7. *Helping to promote a more stable democratic environment:* On occasions, an intervention is necessary to assist in securing the advances made towards a more democratic society. Poland is an example where due to the fractionalization of the center right, nearly 50 percent of the electorate voted for parties that did not meet the threshold for representation in parliament. This created a dangerous disconnect between the citizenry and the representative institutions. By focusing programs on coalition building among center-right parties, a more stable party system emerged. Romania may be ripe for such assistance today.

How then are parties best assisted?

Tom pointed out that long-term training has become the primary vehicle through which party assistance is delivered -- assistance for parties in elections, in between elections (so-called organizational development) and parties in governance, primarily parliament.

But other forms of assistance are fast becoming commonplace and now do more than simply supplement training activities.¹

1. *International party clubs -- the process of political globalization.* Training and high-level consultations, for example, became more effective once we were able to pave the way for the RENAMO party in Mozambique to join the Christian Democrats International [CDI]. The party felt compelled to move more quickly to democratize once being admitted to an international club of democratic parties. The entry of Yemen's Socialist Party in the Socialist International influenced the party's decision to participate in elections. The three party internationals working together may apply those standards more forcefully in the future.
2. *Targeted study missions* of parties from one country to another have had great impact or little affect.
 - Northern Ireland leaders to South Africa (contributed measurably to the Good Friday Agreement)
 - South African parliamentarians to Dublin and London (as a result, seven parties represented in the legislature reached agreement on codes of conduct)
 - Yemeni Socialists to Morocco (led to decision by Socialist Party to participate in elections)
 - Haitian party leaders to South Africa (little impact on political polarization in Haiti)
 - Cote d'Ivoire to South Africa (led to multi-party agreement to diffuse crisis, but events overtook the initiative)

¹ The list of approaches below has since been expanded. Please see appendix for the complete list.

- Zimbabwean party leaders to elections in Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, and South Africa (led to multi-party agreement on electoral reform that was ultimately rejected by ZANU-PF leadership)

3. *Outside Financing of Parties.*

There may be no more than a dozen situations in which substantial material aid was a significant component of direct party development activities and in each case significant limits were placed on such aid.

- In two of these places (Bosnia and Mozambique) material assistance was provided to all the parties.
- In Nicaragua, Belarus and Serbia, assistance to democratic coalitions was prohibited for direct campaign use.
- In Niger, material aid was provided for the parties to conduct civic education efforts calling for a return to civilian rule.
- In Cambodia, assistance was temporarily provided to party leaders who escaped the country following a coup, and assistance was terminated upon their return to Cambodia.
- Other types of material assistance have indirectly benefited parties. For example, in Malawi assistance has been provided for parliamentary committees to conduct public hearings. In Guinea, funds were used to hold inter-party dialogue forums throughout the country. And in Macedonia, more than 40 regional offices are being used to promote links between citizens and parliamentary party caucuses.

The debate over the efficacy and scope of material assistance to parties is a legitimate one. There are times when such aid can enhance measurably democratic institutions and processes. In other instances, it can be divisive and divert attention from other, more pressing organizational tasks. Material assistance, for example, to the UNO coalition in Nicaragua and the democratic opposition in Serbia helped the parties compete but created tensions within both coalitions. Each party within the coalitions was competing for resources.

4. Tom mentioned the concepts of “*working locally*” and “*promoting youth*” as two examples of romantic but perhaps overused mantras of party aid. I would agree, but there are places where such programs have had impact.
 - In Kenya, for example, youth were helped to find avenues for participation in parties other than serving as guards for political campaign rallies. This lowered tensions measurably among parties in advance of last year’s elections.
 - Grassroots work helped affect the way party leaders behaved in Poland and Croatia.
 - Working locally did not succeed in Russia. And while a more open media would have indirectly helped the liberal parties, as Tom mentioned -- it would not have compensated, I believe, for a lack of message and organization.

5. *Creating events or happenings*
 - Macedonia (party codes of conduct)
 - Guinea and Kenya (inter-party dialogues)
 - Cambodia (candidate debates)

6. *Creating Neutral Settings*
 - Georgia (developing electoral reform, building coalitions)
 - Yemen (brokering agreements between ruling and opposition parties)

7. *Protection and solidarity (being there)*
 - Azerbaijan
 - Kazakhstan
 - Taiwan/DPP during martial law

All this can hopefully lead to four fundamental improvements in the way parties operate:

1. The need to represent somebody beyond themselves -- authentic interests
2. Transparent funding
3. Democratization and decentralization
 - more participatory programs for women leadership
 - better internal communications
4. Integrity of leadership in public and private lives

For the International Community

While the parties themselves must assume the primary responsibility for reform, the international community must engage. At the outset, parties and parliamentary party caucuses must be included in all development programs. They must at least have a seat at the table along with institutions of the state and civil society. Simple solidarity gestures do not go unnoticed and can spur parties to assume greater responsibilities themselves -- the PRSP process and political finance reform are examples of opportunities where parties must be engaged.

The incubation period for fledging political parties is much longer than expected by those who fail to understand the deep-rooted foundations that are required. Very often the first few years are devoted to preparing for and contesting elections. Often, there is very little focus on the long-term organizational development of the party until after the second elections.

While some worthwhile progress has been made in recent years in strengthening political parties as part of the larger democratization effort, much more remains to be done.

1. In the area of political party development in particular, and the strengthening of democracy in general, there needs to be a greater concentration of resources in the non-election period.

2. A greater effort in developing parties' capacity in parliament and in governance while linking this to increased citizen participation and outreach to civil society.
3. More assistance in non-election periods focusing on internal democracy and party structure.
4. Initiatives in skills development for women and for reform measures to promote women's political leadership and previously disenfranchised groups such as indigenous groups in Latin America and Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.
5. Programs on party finance reform and measures to combat corruption are needed in every region.

This all requires a call to new action and this conference is an appropriate place to start.

[End]