



**NATIONAL  
DEMOCRATIC  
INSTITUTE**

# Civic Forum Program Haiti



**Democracy = Participation,  
Tolerance,  
Transparency**

*Its Mission*



**NATIONAL**  
**DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**  
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

6, Impasse Prospere Rue Pan-ericaine Musseau, Haiti  
Tel: (509) 256-8616 (509)256-8617  
Fax: (509)256-8618 (509)510-9977  
<http://www.ndi.org>

. is a program of civic education and civic action that helps Haitian citizens  
- .-- in political life by increasing their knowledge of democratic principles and practices, and developing their skills and confidence. As a result, citizens begin working together to advance their interests and to hold government representatives accountable.



**Its .Jt'ormat I**

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Civic Forum begins with training sessions, for grassroots organizations during which citizens discuss themes concerning democracy. Each session is led by a NDI-trained moderator who encourages participants to take part in the discourse and work together. Eventually, moderators also introduce advocacy techniques and encourage citizens to develop campaigns to influence public officials.

The Haitian moderators are the "spark" of the program. Natives of the communes in which they work, they criss-cross the rural sections in order to conduct the program with members of existing grassroots organizations. Their presence in remote communi;-ies and the political neutrality which they maintain, help them gain the trust of the participants. They are thus viewed as reliable and trustworthy resources and "facilitators" who encourage community problem solving and citizen action.

*Port-au-Prince march 2001*

PromoConsult / Pressmax SA



## *Its Character*

The Civic Forum program has several unique elements.

### ***Attention to rural populations***

The program targets rural areas and reaches many previously neglected communities accessible only on horseback, or on foot. These rural populations have a tremendous thirst for democratic alternatives. The Civic Forum sessions bring them information and skills that they would not otherwise receive. As a result, they are better positioned and more willing to participate politically.

### ***Focus on action***

The civic forum is not simply a program of civic education. The curriculum of the program encourages participation and civic action. The groups plan and initiate community projects with their moderators, who serve as guides and advisors.

### ***Work with existing grassroots organizations***

Participants in Civic Forum sessions are drawn from the membership of existing grassroots organizations. In this way, Civic Forum works with citizens that have already organized themselves to some extent.. This fosters the movement to action, because it becomes easier for the participants to identify shared interests and concerns. This approach also helps strengthen the abilities of the participating organizations and allows the program to better reach cross-sections of the population, through women's associations, agricultural cooperatives, youth clubs, etc.

### ***Foundation building***

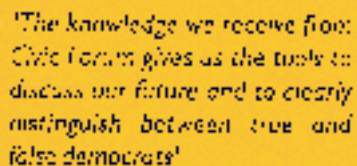
The Civic Forum sessions are not one-time events. Instead, they take place on a regular basis and are designed to build one on another. This contributes to the development of a solid and lasting foundation for democratic political participation.

### ***Political neutrality***

The Civic Forum program operates in a non- partisan fashion. This has helped establish a climate of trust between Civic Forum moderators and citizens.

### ***Responsive to emerging needs***

The Civic Forum program is not static. It responds to realities on the ground and addresses the needs of groups and communities on an individual basis. Different communities have different interests and needs, in terms of information and relevant skills. Civic Forum attempts to recognize and respond to the different needs, within ~ framework of democratic principles,



'The knowledge we receive from Civic Forum gives us the tools to discuss our future and to clearly distinguish between true and false democrats'



*"Before Civic Forum come along, peasants of our community didn't discuss things with intellectuals, but now NDI brings the message : Everyone is a person. Everyone has a voice"*

## *Its Curriculum*

The Civic Forum activities include:

- *Educational discussions*

- *Sectional forums*
- *Communal forums*
- . *Citizens' conferences*

### ***Educational discussions***

The educational discussions are divided in two phases: phase one focuses on learning democratic principles and phase two focuses on citizen action.

### ***Phase One***

- The rights and duties of citizens
- The Executive Branch
- The Legislative Branch
- The Judicial Branch
- Political parties
- Elections
- Organizations
- Decentralization and local government

### ***Phase Tho***

- The link between democracy and lobbying
- Community mapping
- . Identification of priority community issues . Planning of a community action
- Identification and use of tactics
- . Development of techniques for legislative lobbying

The evolution of the program since 1997, in response to community needs, has allowed for the innovation and creation of:



*The Communal Forum*, brings together all of the participating groups within the same commune in order to discuss subjects linked to the needs and concerns of the commune as a whole. It is therefore a unique occasion for these groups to exchange their ideas, to initiate common projects and to meet with local elected officials, all with a spirit of tolerance.

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*The Se&~l Forum* is often organized in prelude to expanded forums, and according to the same format; occurring on a smaller scale and limiting itself to the different groups within a single communal section.

The *Citizens' ColJftrence* consists of community gatherings where organizations interested in the civic forum invite community leaders and elected officials to address specific subjects of local concern.

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*Salange, a health promoter living in Dekouze, a village in the mountains outside of Jacmel, periodically shares the modules of the civic forum program with a group of young students which she has established.*

### *Its results*

As a result of their participation in the

program many groups have taken initiatives, often in concert with local officials, to improve the standard of living in their communities. More importantly participants have collectively abandoned long standing habits and customs in favor of more democratic practices.

. After discussing the role of the justice system residents  
of Via let (PetitGoave)who ~

were in the habit of castrating suspected thieves now bring them to the police so that the judicial process can take its course.

- In 2001 a peasant union in Crepin (Marigot)

worked with their Representative and Hydro- Quebec to provide electricity for their township.

. Prior to elections in 2000 many groups asked to repeat the modules on the role of the legislature and political parties saying that the ifl.formation would better prepare them to choose among the candidates.

. Civic Forum has given birth to a spontaneous movement of volunteers who, having completed the program, wanted to share the civic forum method and message with organizations who have not participated in the program. This volunteer movement was formalized in April 2000 a\$ the Network of Civic Education Volunteers (REVODEC) and currently operates in 4 communes. REVODEC is a means to continue both the message and the spirit of civic forum after NDI has completed its program.