

Conflict Research Program (CRP)

**International Political Party Assistance**  
An Overview and Analysis

**Working Paper 33**

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# Preface

This paper was prepared for the seminar *Lessons Learned in Political Party Assistance*, organized by the Conflict Research Unit (CRU) of the Clingendael Institute on November 4, 2004 in The Hague.

The paper highlights a number of critical issues in the relatively new field of international political party assistance. Apart from giving an overview of actors and their objectives, it subsequently outlines the main foci of political party assistance programs and identifies a number of their strengths and weaknesses. The paper concludes by drawing attention to the key problem areas and remaining issues.

On behalf of the author, Krishna Kumar, I would like to thank a number of people that provided useful comments and suggestions to earlier drafts of this paper. These include Martina Huber of the Clingendael Institute; Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Peter Manikas of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Jan Tuit and Jos van Wersch of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (IMD); and Michele Schimpp of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Finally, as CRU intern, Steven Schoofs helped prepare the executive summary of this report.

The contents and views expressed in this paper are the sole responsibility of the author and should not be ascribed to the Clingendael Institute.

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## List of Abbreviations

|           |  |
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| CALD      | Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats  |
| CPP       | Cambodian People's Party   |
| DA        | Development Associates   |
| FES       | Friederich Ebert Stiftung  |
| FUNCINPEC | National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia |
| IFES      | International Foundation for Election Systems  |
| IRI       | International Republican Institute   |
| KAS       | Konrad Adenauer Stiftung   |
| MP        | Member of Parliament   |
| MSI       | Management Systems International   |
| NDI       | National Democratic Institute for International Affairs                              |
| NDR       | Nash Dom Rossiya – Our Home is Russia  |
| NED       | National Endowment for Democracy   |
| NGO       | Non-governmental Organization  |
| NIMD      | Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy                                       |
| UNDP      | United Nations Development Program   |
| USAID     | United States Agency for International Development                                   |
| USSR      | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics  |

## Executive Summary

Political parties are essential for both the emergence and consolidation of democracies. Some of the vital functions performed by political parties are: representing the people and expressing their demands; reconciling diverse needs and aspirations that exist within society and translating them into manageable programs; structuring electoral choice; and forming a government or holding governments accountable. Finally, political parties help to educate and socialize people into political processes. By performing this wide variety of functions, political parties find themselves at the heart of democracies.

Acknowledging the indispensability of political parties, international political party assistance seeks to reform and strengthen political parties to promote multiparty democracy in transition and post-conflict societies. Specific objectives of political party assistance programs are: improving the organizational capacities of parties; enabling parties to participate in democratic electoral processes; promoting internal democracy within parties; building the capacity of parties to function in the legislature; increasing women's participation in political parties and elected bodies; fostering a multiparty political system by promoting legal and regulatory regimes; and promoting inter-party interactions.

The wide range of these objectives has led the international community to give various kinds of political party assistance. Broadly, six forms of assistance can be distinguished: financial and commodity assistance; technical assistance; assistance with seminars, workshops and meetings; training for political leaders and party functionaries; research and polling; and, finally, visits and foreign tours. Different forms of assistance have varying strengths and limitations, but two observations appear to be highly relevant for all those involved in international political party assistance. First, assistance plans should (better) factor in local conditions before determining the exact approach. Second, it is first and foremost party leaders who should identify the needs of political parties, not the international community.

Political party assistance, like other kinds of international development assistance, is likely to face various problematic issues and dilemmas. This report identifies a number of problem areas. First, the sense of ownership of the party assistance program is still weak in many countries. Among political parties and ruling elites, the prevailing attitude toward assistance is one of indifference and "benign neglect." Second, technical expertise is still lacking. While international actors have improved significantly in their understanding about the highly specific social and political landscapes in which emerging political parties must operate, there is still a critical need to train and use local experts—rather than international experts—in the assistance programs. Third, party assistance programs suffer from short time horizons. Given that party building is a lengthy process, short-term plans may hamper the consolidation of a genuine multiparty democracy. Fourth, due to limited resources, only a certain number of parties can actually receive funding. Internationally agreed upon criteria need to be established in order to select beneficiary parties in a systematic and transparent manner. Fifth, partisanship in international assistance programs has proved useful for the promotion of peace and democracy in some cases. In general, however, partisan assistance tends to blur the distinction between assistance and political manipulation. It is therefore advisable only under special

circumstances. Sixth, the international community needs to address the imbalance between assistance for political parties and assistance for civil society. At present, civil society organizations have received most of the internationally available resources, at the expense of political parties. Due to the unique political roles of political parties, international resources should be reallocated in a more equitable manner. Finally, the report highlights the views of various critics who challenge the current assistance paradigm, claiming it is ill-suited to the highly specific conditions of impoverished transition and post-conflict societies. Because of the current lack of systematic information on this subject, the report concludes by arguing that there is a need for further study and evaluation in the field of international political party assistance.



# I. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Currently, political parties are facing widespread skepticism in many countries. Public opinion polls in Western democracies indicate that people are becoming increasingly cynical about political parties and their leaders and even about representative institutions. Parties are beginning to encounter difficulties in recruiting new members as more and more citizens refuse to identify with a single political party. Even party members are no longer willing to offer unquestioning loyalty as they once did. While political parties still survive, there seems to be an erosion of their authority and legitimacy in established democracies. Conditions are even worse in many developing and transition countries, where public disillusionment with political parties is rampant and can pose a threat to the democratization process itself.

Political scientists have speculated about the reasons for the declining influence and credibility of political parties.<sup>1</sup> Some contend that citizens entertain unreasonable expectations of their political parties and leaders. Different interest groups often make incompatible and irreconcilable demands and then become dissatisfied when their demands can not be met. Others blame the mass media, which tends to project an unfavorable image of political leaders and representative institutions. Journalists are trained to harbor skepticism about the intentions and behavior of political leaders. While this is healthy for the profession, it also breeds doubt and apprehension in the public regarding political parties and democratic institutions. Still others suggest that political parties have been slow to respond to cultural and quality of life issues that cut across party lines in modern post-industrial societies. The leaders of mass based political parties are still committed to ideological frameworks that have become obsolete in the new social and economic conditions. Finally, many political scientists also argue that political party misconduct lies at the heart of the problem, particularly in developing and transition countries, where political leaders flout all the norms of democracy and good citizenship to retain power and enrich themselves and their cronies.

Despite widespread public disenchantment with them, there is no alternative to political parties. Political parties perform several functions that are essential for the functioning of a democratic political order. They aggregate and articulate collective societal preferences. They reconcile diverse needs and aspirations of their constituents and translate them into manageable programs. They provide choice to the citizens who elect government leaders. Political parties facilitate electoral competition within the framework of established laws and regulations by selecting candidates to contest elections and mobilizing support for them. In parliamentary systems, when a party or alliance of parties gains the majority, it forms the government. The losing parties play the role of loyal opposition. In presidential systems, various parties can exercise control in the executive branch and the legislature. Finally, political parties also help to educate and socialize people into political processes. Neither

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<sup>1</sup> Diamond and Gunther (2001) have explored the subject in-depth.

advocacy groupings, which articulate the interests and aspirations of disparate groups, nor grassroots civil society organizations, which operate at the community level, can replace political parties. As Juan Linz (1996) noted:

“Today, in all countries of the world, there is no alternative to political parties in the establishment of democracy. No form of nonparty representation that has been advocated has ever produced democratic government. Thus we are faced with a world of democracies based on parties.”

Political party assistance programs are based on the premise that political parties are essential for both the emergence and consolidation of democracies. They seek to reform and strengthen political parties to promote multi-party democracy in transition and post-conflict societies.

Although the German *Stiftungen* (i.e. foundations) started providing assistance in the 1960s, the rest of the international community did not begin providing political party assistance until the late 1980s. Three primary factors contributed to the emergence of this assistance. First, the wave of democracy that swept over much of the developing world during the 1980s led the international community to design and implement democracy assistance programs to support the democratization process. Such programs focused on civil society, independent media, elections, and political parties. Second, the end of the cold war in the late 1980s led to the resolution of the civil wars fueled by ideological warfare between the two superpowers in countries such as Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Nicaragua. Internationally brokered peace accords in these countries required post-conflict elections to elect new and legitimate governments. International donors provided technical and financial resources for such elections and sometimes included funds for political parties.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the collapse of the Soviet Empire initiated a democratic transition in Russia as well as the countries controlled by the Soviet Union in Europe and Asia. The international community poured massive resources into promoting multi-party democracy in newly free countries. Political party assistance was an integral component of the democracy assistance programs.

## 1.2 Outline

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of international political party assistance to transition and post-conflict societies. Its focus is on assistance programs, and not on political parties. The paper briefly explains the objectives of party assistance and identifies three categories of actors involved in such assistance. It also discusses the focus of assistance programs ranging from organizational capacity-building to the promotion of legal and regulatory reforms. The paper then examines various assistance approaches used and, finally, outlines a set of issues and dilemmas facing the international community. This work is primarily based on program documents and reports, interviews with elected policy makers and practitioners, and the author's own familiarity with a range of democracy and party assistance programs.

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<sup>2</sup> See Kumar (1998) for a discussion of post-conflict elections.

### 1.3 Definitions

A few concepts used in this paper should be explained briefly to avoid confusion. The term “political party” is used in its most generic sense to indicate a group of citizens who are organized to seek and exercise power in a political system. Whether a party is in power or out of power is immaterial for this definition. The concept of “democratic transition” has invited considerable controversy in recent years and for understandable reasons.<sup>3</sup> Without implying any linear progression towards an ideal democracy, the expression is used here simply to refer to those political systems that have at least some trappings of a democratic system: political parties, elections, civil society, and a constitution that guarantees—in theory if not in practice—civil and political rights. The assumption is that such societies have the potential to move towards democracy. “Post-conflict societies” refer to the countries that are emerging from civil wars and violent conflicts. The expression “war-torn societies” include both post-conflict societies and the countries where violent intra-state conflict is ongoing. “International community” refers to governmental and non-governmental organizations, agencies, and groups engaged in providing assistance to other countries.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Carothers’ thought-provoking article in which he questions the assumptions behind the construct of transition (Carothers 2002).

## II. Objectives and Actors

### 2.1 Objectives

The primary objective of international political party assistance programs has been to foster the development of political parties and improve the environment in which they operate. More specifically, political party assistance programs seek to achieve one or more of the following objectives in a given country:

- Improve the organizational capacities of political parties;
- Enhance political parties' capacity to participate in electoral processes in ways consistent with the tenets of a democratic system;
- Promote internal democracy within parties;
- Build the capacity of political parties to function effectively in the legislature;
- Increase women's participation in political parties and elected bodies;
- Promote legal and regulatory regimes for establishing a multiparty political system;
- Promote inter-party linkages and interactions to solve major problems facing the country.

These objectives vary from country to country and time to time, depending on the perceived needs of the recipient nations, the commitment of international donor agencies, and the comparative advantages of intermediary organizations that design and implement political party assistance interventions.

### 2.2 Actors

Three categories of national and international actors have been engaged in party assistance initiatives. The first category includes bilateral and supranational donors such as Germany, Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union. Practically all of them have funded political party assistance programs, often as a component of democracy assistance. Since donor agencies do not list "political party assistance" as a separate funding category, no precise data are available about the volume of such assistance. However, anecdotal information suggests that—as compared to other democracy programs such as civil society, elections, or even media—the funds allocated to political party assistance have been rather modest.<sup>4</sup>

The second category consists of NGOs, political party foundations, multilateral organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and private consulting firms that design and implement assistance initiatives. These organizations serve as intermediaries between donors and

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<sup>4</sup> The relative share of election and political process assistance in the total volume of democracy assistance provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) gives us some indication of the low priority assigned to political party assistance. For example, election and political process category constituted 11.8% in 1998, 5.8% in 1999, and 7.3% in 2000 of USAID assistance in democracy sector.

political parties in recipient countries. In the United States, three NGOs have emerged as major implementers of political party assistance, namely the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) channels practically all of its political party assistance through these organizations. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), funded by the U.S. government, has also been active in political party assistance and has provided grants to many parties in transition countries. The government of Netherlands is one of the funders of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (IMD), which has initiated modest party assistance programs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. UNDP has also supported party assistance programs, albeit on a limited scale. A few private consulting firms in the United States have also participated in political party assistance activities. Management Systems International, Development Associates, and Development Alternatives are good examples.

Also noteworthy are the German political parties' foundations or *Stiftungen*, which are relatively well funded and well organized. The most important ones include the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). Each foundation is connected with a political party and seeks to promote the party's interest and a set of core democratic values associated with it. While these foundations undertake activities to promote civil society, media, and elections, "political party development has traditionally been one of their main areas of concentration."<sup>5</sup> Each foundation targets parties that share the ideology of the party with which it is associated.

The last category consists of NGOs, educational institutions, and other outfits in recipient countries that partner with intermediary organizations. Such organizations often co-sponsor meetings, symposiums, and even training sessions with international organizations. They provide logistical and other support to international organizations, which is extremely valuable, especially when international organizations do not have local offices.

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<sup>5</sup> Carothers (2000), p 141.

## III. Focus of Assistance Programs

### 3.1 Introduction

The international community has given assistance to strengthen political parties and to improve the legal and regulatory environment in which the parties operate. It is important to note that the international community has rarely had a coherent and comprehensive strategy for party development in a country. Instead, its approach has been opportunistic. Interested donors and NGOs have selected specific areas of assistance largely on the basis of local openings, available resources, and their own interests.

### 3.2 Organizational Development

In transition and post-conflict societies most political parties lack a strong organizational base and capacities. Often they are nothing more than temporary entities that come alive during elections and then hibernate in between elections. Therefore, party development initiatives invariably focus on some aspects of organization building. They put forward a vision of a well managed, evolving organization with democratic leadership and a functional organizational structure. As one manual<sup>6</sup> on political party development succinctly points out:

“If there are no discernable decision-making procedures, if people within the party do not understand their roles and responsibilities, and if the communication within the party is not clear and frequent, even a party with good ideas and well-intentioned members can fail to achieve its goals. Too often, political parties make the mistake of devoting all of their resources and energy to short-term election campaigns, rather than building and maintaining a solid, democratic, party organization. Party organization must be a priority for party leaders before issues of campaign organization are addressed.”

Some of the key areas include: membership development and recruitment, message development, communication within political parties; relationships between national, regional, and local units; organization of special events; fundraising; building relationships with outside groups; and opinion polls and research. Usually, a series of training seminars and workshops are organized for party workers.<sup>7</sup> Standard manuals are used to provide general background information and identify specific techniques and steps required to perform specific functions.

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<sup>6</sup> NDI (2001), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> For example, NDI, in close cooperation with the Benin-based “Study and Research Group on Democracy and Economic and Social Development,” held a series of consultations with party leaders, activists, and government officials to decide the focus of the political party training seminars in 1994 (NDI 1995). After ascertaining the views of major actors, it decided to hold three seminars in three cities of Benin. The first seminar, held

### Strengthening Political Parties in Benin

One of the earliest programs for political party development in Africa was undertaken in Benin in 1994. NDI organized a three day conference that focused on party building. Some of the major topics discussed in the conference were as follows:

- *Party Organization and Development*: structure (national and local); party administration; internal communication; defining jobs and volunteer responsibilities; candidate recruitment and training; leadership training; coordination role of party headquarters.
- *Local Party Structure*: role of local office and activists; neighborhood offices; incorporating civic education into voter contact.
- *Defining and Communicating Message within the Party*: issue research; identifying and prioritizing the party message; understanding voter attitudes; development of party message; defining differences from other parties.
- *Getting Message out to the Public*: radio, free press opportunities; press releases and conferences; writing press releases; traditional means of communication.
- *Resourced Development- Volunteer and Financial*: need for outside, independent, and multiple means of obtaining financial and volunteer resources; meeting the needs of volunteers needs; party obligations.
- *Identifying and Using Resources*: planning for financial contributions; budgeting; identifying resources- volunteers and supplies; targeting resources for more efficient use.

A major problem with some organizational development efforts has been that many international experts tend to follow a standardized approach. They work with technical manuals largely based on the U.S. experience in “such areas as basic party organization and function, how to conduct meetings, and membership recruitment.”<sup>8</sup> The above assessment of party development programs also noted that little or no attempt was made to relate the organizational development framework to the realities of Nigeria. Similar observations have been made about training programs in Benin, Bosnia, East Timor, and Russia. The failure to contextualize organizational assistance has undermined the overall impacts of such efforts.

Organizational assistance was particularly useful, however, to the new political parties that emerged after the collapse of communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe. The leaders of these parties had little or no experience in organizing and operating political parties in democratic societies. They had known only communist parties, which had

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September 16-18, focused on structural issues facing political parties. It discussed topics such as the participation of local activists in party activities, bottom-up and top-down communication, and resource development. The second seminar, held October 25-29, focused on information gathering, party platforms, and message development through polling and focus groups. The third and the final seminar, held December 8-10, examined election related topics such as candidate selection, constituency mobilization, and grassroots organizing. The organizers believe that taken together, the three seminars covered many relevant topics that were important for political party development.

<sup>8</sup> Development Associates (2003).

monopolized power. As a result, the information and skills imparted on party development was perceived as timely and relevant by party leaders and functionaries, who earnestly tried to learn from the experience of established democracies, particularly in areas of message development, fund raising, polling, and relationships with other interest groups.<sup>9</sup>

### **3.3 Election Campaigns**

Much of the international assistance for party development has been tied to election campaigns. The international community has designed and implemented initiatives to enable old or newly established political parties to mount effective election campaigns. In particular, assistance programs have focused on topics such as strategic planning for effective campaigns, candidate identification and selection, message/platform development, voter outreach, media relations, campaign funding and budgeting, voter mobilization, opinion polls, poll watching, and vote counting. Intermediary organizations have also organized meetings and seminars to inform political leaders about the laws and regulations governing elections.

International assistance has generally had a positive, and often significant, effect on electoral processes in recipient countries. It has enabled many nascent political parties to better participate in elections by teaching them skills and techniques that they could put to use immediately. For example, after the fall of the USSR, political parties in Central and Eastern European countries found information about fund raising techniques, public opinion polls, and election monitoring quite helpful in elections.<sup>10</sup>

In Asia, NDI has initiated a new program that takes party leaders from selected political parties to observe how other parties (selected from 32 Asian parties that have been involved in NDI's party reform program) are conducting elections in their countries. NDI took outside party leaders to observe elections in Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan.

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<sup>9</sup> The author has discussed this issue with many democracy practitioners who had worked both in Africa and Europe.

<sup>10</sup> This information was supplied to the author by many informants, including experts engaged in electoral assistance.



### **Electoral Assistance to Political Parties in Ukraine**

NDI provided assistance to political parties in Ukraine prior to scheduled elections in March 2002. The following list of meetings, workshops, and training undertaken by the Institute gives an indication of the types of activities that the international community supports.

- On November 23-24, NDI organized a two-day seminar for 37 members of the coalition “For a European Choice.” The seminar provided participants with an overview of various aspects of election campaign at the local level. Some of the topics emphasized were strengthening existing coalitions, organizing joint headquarters, developing a common strategy and message, and direct voter contact;
- On December 9, NDI conducted a one-day consultation for 40 single-mandate candidates from the Socialist Party. Many candidates had the opportunity to assess their resources and prospects in the coming elections;
- On December 12-13, the institute trained 30 party activists from the Socialist Party in Poltava. Among other things, NDI consultants outlined the responsibilities of a campaign manager: organizing campaign headquarters, creating the campaign calendar, enlisting volunteers, and compiling voter lists and data base;
- On December 15-16, the Institute held a two-day seminar on election organizing for 48 regional representatives from “Our Ukraine.” The participants had the opportunity to apply their knowledge on campaign organizing by developing a campaign calendar and plan.

International assistance has also helped parties to introduce many new practices, including multi-party debates and codes of conduct for political parties. The training programs have also helped party officials communicate with voters to learn about local problems. For example, it is reported that as a result of training, party activists in Belarus “started to knock on people’s doors, collect signatures on various petitions, and contact voters directly. In addition, party literature has improved; parties are less inclined to feature pictures and bios of party leaders and more likely to advertise recent successful local initiatives.” (NDI; 2003, p. 18) Voter education activities, though not necessarily a part of political party development initiatives, have also helped inform citizens about their rights and responsibilities as voters.

### **3.4 Participation of Women**

Because of their low social status, limited access to resources, lack of higher education, and lack of political exposure and opportunity to participate in political life, women remain underrepresented in political parties, elected bodies, and the government. Cultural stereotyping and prohibitions create additional barriers. Party assistance interventions along with other “Women in Development” programs have addressed this problem. They have emphasized the need for establishing women’s

departments in political parties to deal with gender issues, giving leadership positions to women in the party hierarchy and fixing quotas for women candidates in elections.

The international community has worked with local women's NGOs and political caucuses to educate women about the importance of elections, women's rights and responsibilities, and the nature of secret ballot. It has also organized workshops and trainings to encourage political parties to recruit women members and candidates. The purpose has been to impress upon political party leaders that increased participation of women in party affairs confers electoral advantages, as it helps to get more women's votes. For example, during 1996 - 1997, NDI organized conferences to educate political parties in Poland:

“NDI organized multi-partisan conferences in Torun and Krakow, through which it publicized its in-country plans and began to convince Polish parties of the importance of targeting women. At the conferences, trainers emphasized that targeting women could be a self-interested election strategy since parties could win more seats if they secured the women's vote. Trainers also repeatedly underscored the basic message that parties strengthen themselves by becoming more receptive to issues and policies attractive to women voters.”<sup>11</sup>

#### **Training for Women Candidates in East Timor**

In July 2001, with the support of the Women's Caucus, the International Republican Institute conducted two training activities targeting women candidates. The first training focused on communication strategies for successful election campaigns. The second training focused on campaign planning. The trainer reviewed some of the basics of structure and organization and discussed the best ways to support individual candidates. The participants also developed campaign material in the course of the training. Women's Caucus also held training for another 55 participants.

The international community has also supported special training programs for women candidates. Such trainings provide information and skills for organizing election campaigns, developing messages targeted to a cross section of populations, printing materials, mobilizing women voters, holding fund raising events, and other related topics. Women trainers usually manage these efforts.

### **3.5 Participation in Legislatures**

For the past two decades, the international community has also funded initiatives to assist political parties in the legislature. Such efforts are an integral part of broader legislative strengthening programs, which, in addition to helping legislators, involve training legislative staff; improving parliamentary infrastructure through the provision of books, fax machines, and other equipment; and

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<sup>11</sup> NDI (2001), p. 29.

assisting the NGOs that promote transparency and accountability in government. Because the executive branch tends to dominate the legislature in transition and post-conflict societies, legislative strengthening programs are necessary to level the playing field. It must be recognized, however, that in many countries, aspects of political environment (corruption, political culture, and institutions) pose structural barriers that cannot be overcome by training and the provision of new facilities.

Party development programs in legislatures prepare legislators to play an effective role in passing new legislation, exercising oversight over the executive branch, and reaching out to their constituencies. They focus on participating in parliamentary committees, holding public hearings, and utilizing mechanisms to widen constituency outreach. Some seminars and workshops also discuss more substantive issues such as the role of the legislative branch, the constitutional relationships between the executive and legislature branches, and the rights and responsibilities of parliamentarians. The international community has organized foreign study tours, held meetings and seminars, and sponsored short-term training for legislators.

Unfortunately, many of these projects have produced little or no visible effects.<sup>12</sup> Often, the most influential legislators have no time to participate in the meetings and seminars. (The only projects they seem drawn to are “study tours” of western countries.) Therefore, relatively junior parliamentarians tend to attend the meetings and seminars and they generally do not wield enough power to shape legislative processes. Moreover, the existing reward system in many African and Eurasia countries does not favor integrity in the legislature. It pays better to stay in the good graces of political and business leaders than to promote transparency and accountability in government.

### 3.6 Multiparty Collaboration

The international community has also supported inter-party linkages and collaboration to deal with major problems and challenges, both at national and regional levels. For example, NDI and the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) launched a project in 2001 to “support political parties in their efforts to implement internal reforms through enhanced democracy, transparency, and accountability.” (CALD: 2002, p. 1) The project supported comparative research in eight Asian countries to examine the legislative frameworks governing parties and political financing and to document party strategies for reducing corruption. It also organized a regional meeting of political party representatives to discuss the findings and formulate recommendations. Sponsors are now planning to establish an anti-corruption resource center for political parties in Thailand.

While the above project operated at a regional level, the Institute for Multiparty Democracy (IMD) undertook a project to promote inter-party dialogue at the national level in Guatemala. The project, launched in partnership with UNDP in 2002, sought to promote consensus among major Guatemalan political parties “on a shared national agenda that reflects basic principles of the Peace Accord.” (IMD: 2003, p. 4) As a result of this initiative, a group of 40 leaders from all major parties engaged in a year long process that resulted in October 2003 in an agenda for the future of the country. The agenda was followed in various ways during 2004.

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<sup>12</sup> My experience confirms the observation by Thomas Carothers (1999, p. 181) that legislative assistance has been the least successful of democracy assistance.

### **3.7 Legal and Regulatory Reforms**

The international community has provided legal assistance to post-totalitarian governments to amend existing constitutions or craft new ones. The modified or new constitutions not only codify civil and political liberties but also lay constitutional foundations for multi-party political systems. In addition, the international community has given technical assistance to frame the rules and regulations for the official registration and recognition of political parties and for party rights and responsibilities. In most countries “parties are required to fulfill legal obligations for official registration and recognition, including a minimum level of membership, a written constitution and platform, and the election of party leaders.” (NDI: 2001, p. 3) The international community has also given assistance to revise the existing rules and regulations governing political financing.

Assistance for legal and regulatory reforms has proved to be quite helpful in many East and Central European countries, enabling countries such as Poland, Czech Republic, and Bosnia to establish a legal framework for multi-party democracy. Such assistance is generally non-controversial and does not require considerable commitment of technical and financial resources. In addition, most transition and post-conflict countries now have constitutional and legal provisions for political party activities and institutional mechanisms that could enforce them if applied. However, problems remain in the actual enforcement of these provisions. Many elected governments try to circumvent them and, in the absence of an effective judiciary and a democratic culture, they succeed.

## **IV. Strengths and Limitations of Different Types of Assistance**

### **4.1 Introduction**

While the popular perception is that international agencies provide only training to political parties, the truth is that they have given and continue to give varied forms of assistance both to political parties and to other related institutions. Such assistance ranges from financial and commodity support to exchange visits and policy or issue oriented research.

### **4.2 Financial and Commodity Assistance**

Many international organizations, such as German foundations and the NIMD, have given grants to political parties to strengthen their organizational base and participate in elections. They have also provided computers, fax machines, and other equipment. Such financial and commodity assistance, though modest, has not been uncommon.<sup>13</sup>

International donors do place some restrictions on such assistance to avoid the appearance of partisanship or prevent its misuse. For example, USAID provided assistance to practically all parties in Bosnia, Mozambique, and Nicaragua. In Belarus, Nicaragua, and Serbia, the recipients of NDI assistance were prohibited from using assistance for direct campaign use. In Niger, “material aid was provided for parties to conduct civic education efforts calling for a return to civilian rule.”<sup>14</sup>

Most democracy experts agree that as a general principle, the international community should not provide substantial financial and commodity aid to political parties. There are many reasons for this.<sup>15</sup> For one, such assistance can create dependencies among recipient parties. If parties are not forced to manage their activities within their own resources, they may become accustomed to practices that are not sustainable. For example, political parties may hire full-time professionals or spend considerable resources on campaign advertising that they are unable to continue when international funding runs out. Another reason is that when assistance is given to just one or just a few parties, it can give the impression that the international community has its own preferred parties and is trying to influence the results of the elections. Finally, party leaders may misuse funds for personal or political advantage or spend them on shortsighted or otherwise ill-conceived ventures. In the past, there have been questions about the proper use of financial aid by party leaders in Cambodia, Mozambique, and Nicaragua.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Doherty (2003), p. 8 notes that NDI alone provided assistance in 12 countries. However, “in each case significant limits were placed on such aid.”

<sup>14</sup> Doherty (2002).

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that a “USAID Political Party Assistance Policy” document issued in 2003 notes: “Commodity support valued at \$50,000 or less may be provided annually to each political party that qualifies for assistance” (USAID 2003).

### 4.3 Technical Assistance

The international community has given technical assistance to governments, legislative bodies, and political parties in order to promote multi-party democracies. Such assistance has been designed to facilitate constitutional and legal reforms, establish regulatory agencies such as election commissions, and in most recent years, to promote reforms in election financing mechanisms. Often one or more legal and other experts are sent to help recipient organizations.

Technical assistance to political parties usually involves individual consultation with parties to improve their functioning or to help solve specific problems. Because of the resource intensive nature of individual consultation, technical assistance is targeted to party headquarters in most cases. It is assumed that once senior party officials obtain the advice they need, they will disseminate the necessary information and communicate it to their local offices.

Individualized technical assistance is always in demand. Recipient organizations welcome it as it focuses on practical problems they are facing or changes they want to introduce. Donors usually do not impose any restrictions on this type of assistance, and recipient organizations are free to use the part they regard as beneficial and discard the rest. Two problem areas exist, however, with regard to the provision of technical assistance. First, technical assistance provided by expatriate experts is quite expensive as it includes consultant fees, air travel, and other expenses. Naturally, this problem does not exist when local experts are available. Second, it is often difficult to find high caliber experts who possess intimate knowledge of the country and the organizations with whom they are expected to consult. Language may pose a major barrier here as well.

### 4.4 Seminars, Workshops, and Meetings

Assistance programs sponsor seminars, workshops, and meetings in which national and international experts make presentations that are followed by discussions. Such events might focus on a specific topic such as fundraising techniques or more general issues such as the role of political parties in fighting corruption. Seminars and workshops can last many days depending on the subject and the availability of participants.

International NGOs such as NDI and IRI have organized both single party and multiparty seminars or meetings. Each has advantages and limitations. In addition to being cost-effective, multiparty seminars can serve to build some trust among competing political parties, as participants realize that all parties face similar problems. On the other hand, in multiparty gatherings, party leaders are reluctant to dwell on their own problems or reveal information that another party might use to its own advantage. Outside experts also feel constrained in these settings because they cannot provide specific advice and guidance according to the needs of the participants. Single-party seminars, on the other hand, are less cost effective but better at meeting specific needs.

Seminars, workshops, and meetings have been instrumental in diffusing new ideas and information on a wide range of topics and issues related to political party development. They have created awareness about problems that political parties face and about the importance of solving them. However, their limitations should not be ignored. The number of participants in seminars and workshops tends to be limited. Large seminars and workshops can be self-defeating, as they do not permit the free discussion and exchange of ideas. Another problem is that of assuring the presence of senior party members with decision making power. Often the people who attend seminars and

workshops lack the authority and prestige to push for change. Follow-up is also a significant problem. At most, it seems that a small summary of discussions is prepared and distributed among the participants after an event is over.

#### **4.5 Training Political Leaders and Party Functionaries**

The distinction between seminars and workshops on the one hand and training on the other is usually blurred in democracy assistance. Intermediary organizations have preferred the labels of “seminars” and “workshops” over “training” because they sound more appealing and politically correct. Training implies a relationship of teacher and student which is not always appreciated by political elites.

An overwhelming majority of the training initiatives supported by the international community have been very short (rarely exceeding three to four days). As training is resource intensive, aid givers have to choose between long-term training for a relatively small number of participants and short-term training for a critical mass of trainees. Although most political training programs have opted for short-term trainings, there are many exceptions. For example, with the support of USAID, NDI has been running a Washington-based two-week leadership development training which is followed by year-long in-country activities during which the trainees design and implement party building projects and share party building techniques with their colleagues. The participants are relatively young, between 25-35 years of age, and they are mayors, municipal councilors, legislators, and party activists in Latin America. Each trainee is assigned a political mentor who assures that the trainee receives support from his/her party.<sup>16</sup>

Training initiatives usually cover topics such as membership recruitment, utilizing volunteers for election campaigns, fundraising techniques, message and platform development, media relations, and poll monitoring. Most political parties, regardless of their ideological orientation, need such skills, and they usually send staff to participate. However, in the absence of disciplined party leadership and internal democracy, the information and skills acquired in the training may be underutilized or not used at all. Furthermore, some techniques and approaches emphasized in trainings are not relevant in transition and post-conflict societies.

Increasingly, intermediary organizations are training party officials, who in turn, are expected to train others. The essential idea is that after completing the training, the trainees become trainers, thereby multiplying and institutionalizing new skills and expertise throughout the political party. As an NDI Manual notes: “In larger countries...in order to reach the widest possible audience within the political party system, it is necessary to recruit and involve party members themselves in training colleagues.”<sup>17</sup> Developing a core group of trainees at party headquarters who can train regional and local units of the party is crucial to the effectiveness of any training program.

International trainers have also included “practical field experience” in trainings. For example, after discussing the nature of “door to door” campaigns, they have encouraged trainees to undertake such campaigning in a small geographical area. Once the trainees finish their assignments, they are invited to share their experiences and draw practical lessons that can be applied in local conditions. Such “hands-on training” has proved to be rewarding both to the trainer and the trainee, especially

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<sup>16</sup> USAID (2002).

<sup>17</sup> NDI (2001), p. 23.

when the former lack an in-depth understanding of the country in which training was conducted. By participating in the practical application of their training, trainers get the opportunity to help address local, country-specific problems and pitfalls and improve their own training curricula.

International NGOs and trainers have also published manuals and handbooks to help political parties. Such publications provide specific guidance to the practitioner on a range of topics such as facilitating communication within parties or managing resources. Often written with the assistance of local experts, they tend to be effective in disseminating information and instructions to party members and functionaries.

#### **4.6 Research and Polling**

The international community has funded opinion polls and policy-oriented research to assist political parties. Opinion polls help political parties develop their platforms and tailor their messages to the public. During election campaigns, they are invaluable in testing the strength of different political parties. When opinion polls are funded as part of an assistance initiative, their findings remain in the public domain and are available to all political parties. Often international organizations have trained party functionaries to manage and interpret poll results.

Some democracy practitioners have questioned the value of opinion polls for both party development and election campaigns. They have argued—with considerable justification—that polls, especially in poor societies, are expensive and not always cost-effective. More importantly, their findings can be misleading because of non-sampling errors. People living in rural and remote areas are often unwilling to share their opinions with strangers. The former ruling coalition led by Bhartiya Janta Party in India learned this lesson in 2004 elections. Prior to elections, polls had predicted its victory, which led to complacency on the part of its leaders and workers and resulted in its defeat. Finally, polls may distract the attention of party leaders from more tedious but necessary activities such as door-to-door canvassing or organizing rallies and meetings.

International organizations have supported research projects on topics like election financing both to generate information and to acquaint political parties with the methodologies that are useful for conducting policy or issue oriented studies. Nothing is known about the impact of such projects. However, some times, the information has been used by international donors as they fashion new interventions. For example, with funds from USAID, the Asia Foundation undertook a large-scale survey of political attitudes and perceptions in Indonesia, which was helpful in developing programs on voter education.

#### **4.7 Visits and Foreign Tours**

Many international organizations have facilitated foreign visits and tours by political party leaders to expose them to the roles and responsibilities of parties and to illustrate the functioning of parliamentary institutions.<sup>18</sup> In addition, western political parties often initiate friendly exchanges with like-minded parties in transition countries. While exposure to party systems in established

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<sup>18</sup> For example, in February 2002, NDI organized a half-day meeting for 20 Montenegrin parliamentarians at the U.S. Capitol. The delegates met with congressional staff.



democracies is always welcome, it is doubtful if visits by a few political party leaders have any significant effect on political party development. Unless carefully planned, such trips assume the characteristics of what many development experts have called “development tourism.” Often the visiting party leaders end up meeting mid-level officials who are blissfully ignorant of the political scene in the countries from which delegations come.

On the other hand, when the purpose is to solve a specific problem or problems by learning from the experience of other countries, foreign study tours can be useful. For example, after the elections in Ukraine, members of parliament were being lured away by various parties, creating apprehensions about the political stability of the government. One possible solution was to pass new legislation governing the conduct of parliamentarians. The National Democratic Institute therefore organized a study tour of Ukrainian parliamentarians to Poland and Russia during 1999-2000 to expose them to the laws and practices in these countries about changing political parties. Consequently, “NDI partners in the Parliament introduced amendments to the Election Law, the Law on the status of a Member of Parliament (MP), and the Constitution in 2001, requiring MPs elected through party lists to stay in their party faction”.<sup>19</sup> These legal initiatives were approved by the Constitutional Court and voted on by parliament. The study tour was helpful in promoting the necessary legislative reforms.

All the above assistance approaches have their strengths and limitations. Often they complement each other. Two general observations can be made, however. First, assistance programs should seriously study local conditions before deciding on concrete assistance approaches. This point has been rightly stressed by a recent evaluation of political party development in Nigeria:<sup>20</sup>

“Political party assistance must factor in environmental conditions (political, institutional, socioeconomic, and cultural) to be relevant and useful. Unlike in developed democracies where citizens identify with ideology or program of a party, join as members and, sometimes, contribute in-kind, the spirit of volunteerism is yet to take root in Nigeria’s nascent democracy. Party membership is yet to develop as a civic choice, loyalty, ideology or conviction. The consequence of this, for example on polling agent training, is that assistance efforts need to include consideration of whether those trained could be remunerated so that there can be a return on the assistance investment.”

Second, experience has shown that the needs of political parties should be identified by party leaders and not by international donors or intermediary organizations. Although the leaders may need assistance to look beyond their traditional approaches or short-term needs, it is important that any assistance provided address the needs as they are perceived by political parties themselves. When political parties are not convinced about the usefulness and relevance of a training seminar or any other form of assistance, the project is unlikely to have a significant impact. It is more likely that senior political leaders will send low-ranking party officials to seminars and trainings or that they will simply ignore the recommendations of outside consultants.

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<sup>19</sup> NDI (2001), p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Development Associates (2003); p.14.

## **V. Issues, Problem Areas, and Dilemmas**

Like other areas of international democracy promotion, political party assistance has suffered from many limitations. Many critical issues still need to be resolved. This section briefly discusses some of these issues and problems.

### **5.1 Lack of Local Ownership**

The international community has often faced criticism and apprehensions about the political party assistance it gives. Parties on the left may believe assistance programs are designed to undermine them and strengthen the moderate and right-wing parties. Ruling or disproportionately endowed parties tend to be suspicious of assistance, especially when they are not getting a substantial share. Many intellectuals—journalists, writers, and academics—contend that foreign powers should not engage in activities that directly or indirectly affect election outcomes. Finally, many civil society organizations, particularly those with negative opinions of political leaders and parties, believe that NGOs are in a better position to articulate the public interest than political parties.

In many countries the author has visited, the prevailing domestic attitude towards party assistance was one of “benign neglect”. Most political parties and ruling elites do not oppose assistance, and certainly do not mind receiving it. However, they are not very enthusiastic about it. There is no sense of ownership of the party assistance programs. The truth is that only a few countries have political constituencies that strongly favor political party assistance.

Several steps can be taken to allay genuine apprehensions and promote local ownership. First, as much as possible, donors should channel political party assistance through intermediary organizations. The use of professional NGOs, consulting firms, and other organizations creates a buffer between foreign governments and political parties. The involvement of such intermediaries is critical in the case of major powers, which have to protect their own global and regional interests. Second, donor cooperation should be encouraged. Political elites in recipient countries feel less threatened when several donors are engaged in a program, because no single donor exerts total control over the assistance. Third, the international community should attempt to collaborate with local partners—NGOs, educational and research outfits, or even private sector firms. When suitable local organizations lack adequate institutional capacity, financial and technical assistance should be given to improve their ability to undertake political party development programs.

### **5.2 Limited Technical Expertise**

Another problem area is the dearth of experts who are both well versed in the organizing and managing of political parties and possess a deep understanding of recipient countries and their political parties. During the 1980s and early 1990s, most political party experts and trainers came from the United States and Western Europe. Although they possessed in-depth knowledge of the working of political parties in advanced democracies, their understanding of the social and political landscape in

the transition countries was usually limited. Many did not comprehend the structure and functioning of political parties in these countries, and often they were not fluent in the local languages, which created communication barriers.

As a result, many assistance programs at that time fell short of the expectations of the participants. In recent years, conditions have improved. Western trainers have become more sophisticated in their approach and understanding of the countries in which they consult. Moreover, international NGOs are increasingly using local trainers and experts from neighboring countries. As a recent evaluation of USAID political party assistance in Russia noted:

“Increasingly, Russian trainers who have learned their trade with one of the two organizations (IRI and NDI) are featured. IRI trained a dynamic Russian trainer during its work with NDR, whose charismatic style, and IRI-sponsored textbook on politics in Russia have frequently served as central elements in other training sessions. NDI materials were also cited as a major plus of their teaching method.”<sup>21</sup>

The Russian case is not alone. International organizations now have access to party experts from Africa, Asia, and Latin America who have become proficient in their trade and are able to provide high quality assistance with limited cost to international agencies. However, there is still a critical need to train more experts who can consult with political parties and other groups at national and regional levels. Such experts would need extended training, ranging from four to six months, in different aspects of party building.

### 5.3 Limited Time Horizon

While most assistance programs for civil society and media are planned for five years, political party development projects tend to have a life span of only one or two years. One possible explanation is that party assistance is generally associated with elections in the minds of policy and decision makers in funding agencies. They fund party development activities when fresh elections are planned in a transition or war-torn society, but they lose interest in party assistance once elections are over. Perhaps this is also true of the political parties targeted by the assistance programs. Unfortunately, party building is a long process. Training people, assisting organizational development, and strengthening an environment favorable to multiparty democracy requires sustained assistance.

One solution to this problem is to develop both long-term and short-term party assistance programs. Long-term initiatives could focus on such things as developing the organizational capacity of political parties, promoting inter-party linkages and cooperation, reforming regulatory regimes that govern political parties, reforming election financing, etc. Short-term assistance could focus on elections and election campaigns.

It is worth noting here that the resources available for party development projects are woefully inadequate. In most cases, international funds are barely sufficient for organizing more than a few seminars and training programs. Moreover, most resources allocated to party development are spent on election-related activities rather than building organizational capacity. Only in high profile

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<sup>21</sup> Cohen, Russell and Makarenko (2000), p. 13.

countries such as Serbia and East Timor did the international community make sufficient resources available for political party development. In both these countries, international party development programs have been quite effective.<sup>22</sup> The development of long-term projects would require the international community to commit additional resources.

#### **5.4 Inclusiveness or Selectivity**

A practical issue with major political implications is the process of selecting the parties that will receive assistance. It is necessary to select certain parties because in most cases, it is simply not possible to assist all the existing parties. Many developing and transition countries have dozens of parties. The international community does not have enough resources to assist each and every one of them. Even if sufficient resources did exist, it is doubtful if such a course would be optimal. Many existing parties have no realistic chance of becoming major players in the political arena. Others may advocate political and social goals that are incompatible with the ideals of democracy and pluralism. Still others may be dominated by a few corrupt leaders.

During the 1980s and even early 1990s, the international community did not follow any objective criteria to identify eligible political parties. Their selection process was often opportunistic; they simply selected the parties they considered most promising or desirable according to their political point of view. In many cases, they focused on the parties represented in parliament. This opportunistic approach often created a perception in recipient countries that the purpose of the assistance programs was not to promote multiparty democracy, but rather to support those parties that were friendly to outside powers or had shared ideological orientations. This perception undermined both the credibility and effectiveness of party assistance programs.

Over time, international donors and intermediary organizations have developed a set of criteria to identify political parties for assistance programs.<sup>23</sup> First, the party should be committed to democracy and adhere to nonviolent, constitutional means to achieve its objectives. This criterion rules out assistance to parties that subscribe to totalitarian ideologies or espouse violent methods to gain power. Second, the party should have a broad base of popular support throughout the country. In practice, this implies that other factors being equal, the international community should prefer national rather than local and regional parties. Third, the party should be registered or authorized to participate in elections and political processes within the framework of existing laws and regulations. Fourth, the party should subscribe to pluralism in theory and practice, following an inclusive approach to political participation. Political parties based on ethnicity, religion, race, or other such considerations are invariably excluded from international assistance programs. Fifth, the party should demonstrate internal democracy or should at least try to achieve it.

Generally, these criteria have been increasingly accepted by the international community. However, there are differences of opinion concerning the registration of political parties, as many semi-authoritarian governments tend to refuse to allow the registration of an opposition party for political reasons.

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<sup>22</sup> See Carother's (2001). Evaluations conducted by USAID/OTI indicate the positive contribution of international assistance in East Timor.

<sup>23</sup> Doherty (2002).

All practitioners agree that party selection should be done in a systematic, transparent manner. The international community should clearly spell out the eligibility criteria and consult local experts, democracy organizations, political parties, and officials of international donor agencies to understand the local political scene and the status of various political parties.

### **5.5 Partisanship**

A related issue concerns the partisanship shown by some international donors towards one or a few political parties, particularly in post-conflict societies. The basic objective is to influence the outcome of elections by supporting favorite parties. Such partisanship has not been uncommon in many war-torn and transition societies. For example, in Nicaragua's 1990 elections, the United States directly and indirectly funded the National Opposition Union, a coalition of fourteen opposition parties. In the 1993 elections that initiated the democratic transition in Cambodia, many international donors supported an opposition party called the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC). European and U.S. political parties and NGOs also gave assistance to nascent opposition parties in Eastern and Central Europe after the collapse of USSR. In Serbia's 1999 elections, international donor agencies provided considerable assistance to opposition parties to defeat the Milosevic regime.

Such partisanship tends to be problematic as it blurs the distinction between assistance and political manipulation. Political parties that are denied assistance resent it. Parties that receive funds may find that their image is tarnished, as they are accused of being subservient to foreign interests. Even independent leaders and intellectuals are critical of assistance programs that openly favor a party or group of parties.

On the other hand, partisan assistance can promote peace and democracy. Without the direct support of Western countries, opposition parties would not have succeeded in toppling the Milosevic regime, which led to the democratic transition of Serbia. In Nicaragua, absent outside assistance, the National Opposition Union party would not have broken the Sandinista hold on power. In Cambodia, FUNCINPEC owed its electoral victory, at least in part, to generous outside assistance, although even after gaining the majority it had to enter into an alliance with the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP).

In any case, most policymakers and practitioners agree that partisan assistance to political parties should be avoided even in post-conflict societies. If aid is absolutely necessary, it should be channeled through multilateral agencies in a transparent manner. For example, USAID now requires a special waiver from its overseas missions in order to provide assistance on a partisan basis. No waiver can be given, however, for use of development assistance.<sup>24</sup>

### **5.6 Balancing Political Party and Civil Society Assistance**

Balancing assistance for civil society and political parties is yet another thorny policy issue that has not received the attention it deserves.

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<sup>24</sup> USAID (2003).

During the past two decades, civil society organizations have emerged as major actors in transition and post-transition societies. They played a major role in promoting democratic transition in Central and East European countries. They also contributed to the emergence of democratic institutions in South Africa and East Asian countries, particularly in the Philippines. Nascent and established civil society organizations have been articulating the interests of different socio-economic groups and exerting pressure on governments to introduce social and political reforms practically all over the world. Where strong political parties do not exist, civil society organizations are taking up the roles and responsibilities traditionally performed by political parties. As a recent document puts it:<sup>25</sup>

“So we can see that such functions as representation, mobilization, and even putting up candidates are increasingly performed by civil society organizations. Even the functions widely considered to be the preeminent domain of political parties—interest aggregation—are under attack. Jankowski (1988) argues that broad-based interest groups may aggregate interests more effectively than political parties in some circumstances.”

It is not surprising, therefore, that the international community has devoted considerably more resources to promoting and strengthening civil society organizations than it has to political party assistance programs. There are also more mundane reasons for this favoritism. It is easier to channel funds to nonpartisan civil society organizations than to political parties or the organizations that support them. It is undoubtedly less controversial to promote civil society organizations than to strengthen political parties. Moreover, civil society organizations have acquired remarkable expertise in developing funding proposals on topics and terms that seem to resonate with the donor community. Usually headed by educated professionals proficient in English or another international language, civil society organizations can easily communicate with the representatives of international funding agencies.

Whatever the reason, the existing imbalance in international assistance does not serve the interests of multiparty democracy. Greater focus on civil society may be justified in the countries that do not permit multiparty democracy or those that have strong political parties that leave little space for civil society. In other cases, however, international favoritism of civil society over political parties can be harmful to the growth of responsible political parties. As Doherty argues, this imbalance in assistance “has the unintended consequence of devaluing and marginalizing the foundations of the representative democracies, political parties, and legislatures within which they operate.”<sup>26</sup> Civil society organizations, by their very nature, represent specific interests and issues. They are committed to specific causes and mobilize people to achieve them. Despite the claims of a few ardent advocates, most experts agree that civil society organizations do not and perhaps cannot aggregate the collective interests of diverse political constituencies. This role is better played by well-organized and mass-based political parties. Moreover, civil society organizations cannot enact laws, form governments, or serve as loyal opposition. The truth is that a healthy political system requires both well-structured mass-based political parties and a dense network of civil society organizations providing voice to disparate interests.

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<sup>25</sup> USAID (2004), p 8.

<sup>26</sup> Doherty (2002), p. 2.

The international community can take several steps to promote a balanced growth of both civil society and political parties. First, it should allocate existing resources in a more equitable manner. What is a proper balance will of course differ from country to country and time to time. If political parties are weak and civil society organizations relatively more effective, more resources should be allocated for political party development, and vice versa. Second, international organizations should encourage civil society organizations they assist to take steps that promote an environment that enables the growth and functioning of multiparty democracy. They can, for example, work for the reform of legal and regulatory regimes that govern political parties and elections. They can monitor elections, organize public forums where representatives from various political parties present their agendas, and even serve as intermediaries to channel assistance for political party development. Third, international organizations should also encourage some civil society organizations to enter into partnerships with political parties. Such relationships may help political parties to sharpen their political agendas and mobilize public support and help civil society to gain political influence.

### 5.7 Relevance of Assistance Models

Finally, some critics question the relevance of current party assistance models. They do not question any particular aspect of party assistance projects but rather the assistance paradigm itself. Their argument can be briefly stated as follows: The concepts, strategies, techniques, methodologies, and prescriptions of international assistance programs are primarily derived from the experience of mass-based, secular political parties. Such parties have evolved in Western democracies that are characterized by high levels of urbanism, literacy, political consciousness, and economic prosperity. However, the socio-economic conditions and cultural traditions of most transition societies—particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East or Central Asia—are different from those in Western democracies.<sup>27</sup> Their political parties are organized differently and function differently. Consequently, much international assistance tends to be of limited relevance to the parties in these countries.

For example, critics suggest that most political parties in predominantly rural societies, irrespective of their professed ideology, are clientelistic in nature. Party leaders provide and are expected to provide a range of services and assistance to citizens in their areas of operation. Such help may range from getting the voter admitted to a public hospital to intervening on his/her behalf with government

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<sup>27</sup> For example, Ottaway and Chung (1999, p. 5) have noted: “The models of party organization and finance, however, remain tied to the contemporary experience of industrial societies instead of the conditions of each emerging democracy. In promoting these models, donors risk forgoing cheaper forms of party organization that in addition to costing less might also create more vibrant, representative party structures”. The authors cite two examples; employment of full time party workers to manage party affairs and high election campaign costs. First, they argue that the international political party training programs are “oriented toward full-time activists and often suggest techniques, such as television broadcasts or polling that cannot easily be implemented by volunteers.” The employment of full time party organizers has been a relatively new innovation in established democracies. In the past, in the United States and Canada, political parties relied largely on part-time volunteers. Second, the authors point out that training courses often emphasize sophisticated campaign techniques such as opinion polls, focus group discussions, highly crafted media messages, and even advertising that are unrealistic and unjustified in view of the limited resources of these countries.

officials to secure fertilizers at subsidized rates.<sup>28</sup> The client, on his/her part, is supposed to give political support to the patron leader. The patron and client relationship also exists between the local and national leaders of parties. The exchange of favors between leaders and citizens constitutes the very foundation of their legitimacy and effectiveness.

Under clientelistic arrangements, critics argue, many of the ideas and techniques advocated by outside trainers and experts do not make much sense. Since the loyalty is to a person, party manifestoes and agendas do not help mobilize voters during elections. Candidates for electoral offices are selected on the basis of their relationships with different factions in the party headquarters. Therefore drafting objective criteria for selecting candidates is simply a waste of time and energy. Moreover, legislators are elected not on the basis of their performance in the legislative bodies but rather on the help they are able to render to their clients. As a result, they have little incentive to spend their time in legislative caucuses and meetings.

Moreover, less developed transition societies have parties largely based on race, ethnicity, caste, or tribe. Such parties, labeled “particularistic socio-cultural parties” by Herbert Kitschelt, are common in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and in many parts of South America. Their overarching mission is to advance the social, cultural, and economic status of their groups. Because these parties capitalize on emotive issue of identity, they are usually dominated by highly charismatic leaders. According to Diamond and Gunther such parties have “an extremely low level of ideological or programmatic commitment and coherence, and they typically lack a highly developed organizational structure and formal membership base.”<sup>29</sup>

“Particularistic socio-cultural” parties have organizational structures and follow strategies that are at variance from those advocated by party assistance programs. Their electoral strategy is to solidify their political base by referring to real or imaginary grievances of their sectional group. Instead of articulating the interests of multiple socio-economic groups and strata, they thrive in creating a sentiment of “us” against “them” to mobilize their constituencies. They hardly present a coherent program before the electorate, as suggested in political party assistance manuals and training programs; they only make vague promises to secure additional benefits from the state for their constituencies.

According to some critics, Islamic political parties in Muslim countries or countries with substantial Muslim populations also highlight the limitations of the assistance paradigm. Some radical Muslim parties seek to impose Islamic beliefs and practices on the body politic and derive their legitimacy from their own interpretation of Islamic religious texts. They mobilize their followers in the name of Islam and use mosques, religious schools, and other Islamic institutions to socialize people in their professed ideology. Islamic parties have been growing and competing effectively with secular parties in many parts of the world. The international community generally excludes them from its assistance programs, while Islamic parties view assistance programs as nothing but subtle attempts by Western powers to promote their “decadent” ideology.

The examples are many; but the essential argument of the critics remains the same, i.e. the assistance framework is suited to economically and socially advanced societies rather than to the conditions of impoverished transition and post-conflict societies. That party assistance has been more

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<sup>28</sup> The author has witnessed many cases in which local party leaders argued the case of their local clients with international donors in Asia and Africa.

<sup>29</sup> Diamond and Gunther (2001), p. 23.



effective in Central and Eastern Europe than in Africa with the sole exception of South Africa provides some indirect support to the above criticisms.

However, the above reasoning is not fully justified and cannot be taken at its face value. The very premise that the current models of party assistance are exclusively derived from the experience of western societies is only partly true. The premise was valid in the late 1980s and early 1990s when assistance programs were initially launched; however, the situation has drastically changed with the increased understanding of political parties in non-Western countries. Empirical investigations of the organization and operations of political parties in different parts of the world have generated rich empirical data and information, which have considerably helped international NGOs to refine their concepts, tools, and approaches for party development. Moreover, their continual engagement in democracy assistance programs has broadened the intellectual horizons of international NGOs. For example, aid practitioners are fully aware of the clientelistic nature of many political parties and take it into consideration when discussing organizational development.

Moreover, many of the concepts, methodologies, and techniques emphasized in party development programs can be universally applied with minor adaptations. A good example of this adaptability is the advice regarding media relations. Party training programs invariably stress the importance of effective media relations and provide general guidance on how to hold news conferences, supervise the production of election commercials, and cultivate media persons. All types of parties—clientelistic, Islamic, “particularistic socio-cultural,” or secular—can use the guidance to their advantage. Some adjustments may be required, however, depending on the local setting. In poor countries, parties would maximize the use of radio as a medium to reach the public, whereas in rich countries some parties would advertise on television as well.

Finally, as a result of economic growth, globalization, and advances in telecommunications, many transition societies are acquiring some of the attributes of western societies. People are increasingly living in cities, for example, and this has undermined the traditional means of social control. As a result of industrialization, particularistic relationships are paving the way for more universalistic, formal interactions in the work environment. The growth of literacy and increased access to modern means of communication are making people more receptive to the ideals of democracy. Economic prosperity has increased the political awareness of a cross section of the people living in transition societies. All these developments are probably affecting political parties as well. Although no sweeping generalizations are warranted, there are indications that political parties in relatively more advanced transition societies are acquiring organizational structures, strategies, and functions that have been associated with mass-based political parties in Western societies. Therefore, even if one assumes that most of the assistance programs are structured on the model of established political parties in the west—which is not necessarily the case—party assistance programs can serve locally relevant objectives in transition countries.

This overview of the international political party assistance highlights the need for further studies, evaluations, and academic investigations of international party assistance. The academic literature on the subject is almost non-existent; there are no scholarly articles, graduate theses, or books to guide policymakers and the practitioner in the field. International donor agencies and intermediary organizations have undertaken very few evaluations, and their findings are not in the public domain. Such evaluations have rarely examined the effects of assistance on the growth of multiparty

democracy.<sup>30</sup> Although policy guidelines and manuals issued by a few donor agencies and intermediary organizations are available, they tell us little about the relevance and effectiveness of assistance programs, their impacts on party development and the factors affecting them. This information gap urgently needs to be bridged in order to promote sensible policies and effective programming.

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<sup>30</sup> USAID is currently designing a multi-sector research initiative that will examine the impacts of political party assistance (along with other democracy assistance program) on recipient countries.

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