

Semiannual Report
SAMARA, RUSSIA: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. 118-A-00-99-00059-00
November 1, 1999 - March 31, 2000

I. SUMMARY

In November 1999, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) established a small office in Samara, Russia, under the USAID Regional Initiative. The Institute is organizing projects to promote citizen participation in regional and local decision-making. Through partnerships with local and oblast governments and civic organizations, NDI seeks to establish procedures for promoting and sustaining local citizen involvement in all aspects of political, economic and community development and help create a fertile and transparent environment for future democratic and market reforms.

Although the cooperative agreement began in May 1999, the launching of NDI's project in Samara was delayed because the search for a field representative took longer than expected. Barry Reed, NDI/Samara field representative, arrived in Samara in the beginning of November and began implementing civic participation projects. With NDI assistance, Samara's civic activists joined the region's leading businessmen in a special task force established to evaluate the region's tourism prospects. A set of recommendations for improvements in this industry will be submitted to Samara Governor at the end of the year. In addition to this important undertaking, NDI/Samara proposed to the oblast administration to integrate citizen participation into its budgeting process. As a result of this project, greater publicity of the budget's contents will be encouraged. NDI/Samara is also preparing to assist in establishing citizens' committees that would advise various departments of the oblast government. NDI is also teaching a course on democratic principles at a local high school. A central component of the course is helping to organize a student government.

As most of these projects remain at the beginning stage, it is still too early to assess their impact. Still, NDI has been gratified by the enthusiasm with which its proposals have been greeted by Samara officials and the spirit of cooperation the Institute has encountered.

II. BACKGROUND

To support the development of democracy and political pluralism, the National Democratic Institute has worked in Russia since 1991 and operated an office in Moscow since 1992. Since 1993, NDI has conducted more than 18 programs aimed at strengthening democratic institutions in Samara. Seminars and consultations focused on strengthening regional branches of political

parties and civic advocacy groups, and encouraging political and civic groups, in turn, to engage citizens in the political process to influence policy. NDI programs have also focused on aiding regional and local officials in their attempts to advance local government reforms, with particular attention to establishing a legal and practical basis for local self-government and promoting citizen involvement in public affairs. Also, numerous activists and officials from Samara have been invited to NDI programs outside of the region. For example, Samara activists have attended party-building, civic advocacy, local government and trainer-development seminars in Moscow.

Repeated visits by NDI staff to Samara have provided the Institute with ties to a wide network of organizers and officials. At an October 1994 meeting, Samara Governor Konstantin Titov thanked NDI representatives for their work in the region and encouraged the Institute to continue its work there. Governor Titov also visited NDI in Washington in the fall of 1999, and afterwards expressed his appreciation for NDI's assistance and cooperation. In addition to its positive relations with the oblast administration and legislature, NDI is acquainted with various local level officials and has good working relations with a wide range of civic activists in Samara.

In November 1999, NDI opened its office in Samara and commenced its work. Through partnerships with local and oblast governments and non-governmental organizations, NDI aimed to establish sustainable citizen task forces that would promote local citizen participation in decision-making processes, foster economic, political and community-based linkages, and create and maintain a stable environment for democratic and economic development. By fostering dialogue between government, citizens and businesses, these projects would increase prospects for the design and implementation of politically-viable economic development policies, demonstrate to potential investors that communities are committed to creating favorable conditions for economic growth and address concerns about corruption by introducing measures for government accountability and transparency. The Institute established as its objectives on the NDI/Samara Citizen Participation project:

- \$ strengthening democratic institutions and procedures;
- \$ creating grass-roots linkages between government, business and community-based organizations;
- \$ establishing sustainable citizens' task forces, focussed on specific issues, that would provide for citizen participation in local decision making;
- \$ enabling local government officials, business leaders, and citizen task forces to conduct public hearings on specific issues; and
- \$ improving the climate for economic growth and political reform in the Samara region.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

During November and December 1999, NDI's field representative Barry Reed set up his office and conducted an assessment of the status of citizen participation in Samara. Through meetings with oblast and municipal officials, civic organizations, international and local businesses, analysts, and representatives of USAID, Mr. Reed identified a number of opportunities for injecting greater citizen involvement into government operations. Many of these projects are still

in the planning stages, and will be discussed briefly at the end of this document. Those that are already underway are discussed in more detail below.

\$ **Tourism Development.** In cooperation with the Samara Chamber of Commerce and the Oblast Administration, NDI has facilitated the establishment of a task force to evaluate prospects for greater tourism in Samara. The committee included a cross-section of the community, including ordinary citizens and representatives of government, NGOs and businesses. Throughout the coming nine months, NDI will assist the task force in conducting a full examination of the current state of tourism, analyzing strengths and weaknesses of this sector, and in developing a coherent, realistic set of recommendations for improvements. More than 30 attendees actively participated in the first meeting of the tourism task force on February 29. After the project's introduction by NDI's Barry Reed, the participants discussed general impressions of tourism and analyzed different tourist offerings currently available in the region. The second meeting took place on March 29. The task force should complete its work and issue a set of recommendations in October 2000. They will present the report to Samara's governor, mayor, and the media. The document will also be widely distributed to citizens, businesses and other interested parties.

\$ **Citizen Participation Training.** NDI/Samara recognized a lack of knowledge about citizen participation among Samara's residents, and plans to contact NGOs, political parties, Duma deputies, representatives of local government and others who would be interested in the basic training on the subject. Program participants will be encouraged to rethink and change the bylaws and policies of their own organizations, and include citizen participation in their everyday work. As of February 29, 2000, NDI/Samara had prepared the necessary training materials for these sessions. In March and April 2000, meetings with different groups and individuals will be scheduled.

\$ **Student Citizen Participation.** In response to requests to work with youth on understanding democracy and citizen participation, in February 2000, NDI/Samara began teaching a class on government and democracy to a group of high school students at Samara School 11. In addition to the theoretical class work, NDI will assist students in the creation of a student government association for the school and an advisory board composed of students, teachers, parents and administrators.

IV. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

NDI/Samara is now preparing to launch several additional potential projects, in addition to the activities already underway.

\$ **Oblast Administration Advisory Committees.** In consultation with First Vice-Governor Logoydo, NDI has proposed creating a system of advisory committees for two to three departments of the Oblast administration. NDI envisions that the committees, composed of Samara citizens and NGO, business and industry

representatives, would meet with department heads and staff on a quarterly basis. NDI would seek to establish these advisory committees as influential mechanisms in oblast decision-making.

§ **Oblast Budget Transparency.** During a visit to NDI in Washington, D.C. in November 1999, Samara Governor Konstantin Titov expressed interest in increasing the transparency of all government operations, particularly the Oblast budget. NDI has not submitted a proposal to the administration to integrate transparency features into the budgeting process. NDI seeks to assist the oblast administration in gathering more public input during budget preparations and encouraging greater publicity and flow of information of the budget contents to the general public.