

Evaluation of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Kyrgyzstan

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Executive Summary

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) has worked peripherally in Kyrgyzstan since 1994 and more intensively in the country since 1997. In this capacity, NDI has been one of USAID's primary implementing partners in providing Kyrgyzstan with assistance in the democratization of their political process. In particular, NDI has worked in the fields of election monitoring, parliamentary processes, civic education and activism, promoting public political debate, and political party building.

Purpose: The primary purposes of this assessment are to determine the impact of NDI's programming since 1997 on the political development of Kyrgyzstan per the strategy for USAID's assistance in this development, to assess the present state of democratization in the country, and to recommend any changes in programming that may be appropriate given the country's deteriorating political situation in the aftermath of the flawed elections of 2000.

Methodology: The assessment was conducted over a two-week period of intensive meetings, roundtables, and focus groups conducted in Washington, DC.; Almaty, Kazakhstan; and several locations in Kyrgyzstan. The majority of time was spent in the field in Kyrgyzstan and included eliciting the viewpoints of a wide range of international development implementers and local political and civil society actors.

Political Environment: The political environment of Kyrgyzstan was found to be deteriorating rapidly due to the Government's backsliding on democratic reforms, the repression of political activists challenging the present Government, the suppression of media outlets reporting on controversial political issues, and the entrenchment of existing political elites. At the same time, the assessment found that a citizen movement for democratic change had been empowered during the last year that intends to challenge the Government's increased backsliding. The ability of this movement to seriously challenge the Government's undemocratic processes, however, remains quite limited.

Findings and Recommendations: Given the difficult political environment of the country and the fact that the Kyrgyz Government pays more lip-service to democratization than it exerts energy towards its realization, NDI has performed commendably. In particular, NDI has gradually come to play an important role in Kyrgyzstan as one of the international organizations most aggressively pushing the envelope to keep the country's political space from further closing.

NDI's most significant accomplishments to date have been in its support of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society. Through its assistance to this local NGO, NDI has helped to support a citizen movement for democratic reform that is presently one of the strongest obstacles in the country to what appears to be the Government's intention of closing off all avenues to political pluralism and citizen participation. In addition, NDI has assisted parliamentarians to establish themselves as a partial balance to executive power and has played a role in generating public political discussion, particularly through their support for the public affairs television show *Nashe Vremya (Our Time)*.

NDI has also tried to help various political parties to develop their organizations into instruments of promoting competing political viewpoints, but the results of this assistance have been limited by the political environment as is demonstrated by the Government's

disqualification of several political parties from the 2000 elections. NDI additionally has worked to promote women's participation in the political process, but this activity was mostly unfulfilled and, thus, has shown few results.

On the management side, however, the assessment found that NDI has frequently been untimely in its workplan and quarterly report submissions. Additionally, the team found that NDI's aggressive approach has at times blinded the organization to the contribution of other international organizations that, while not as aggressive in their challenges to the Kyrgyzstan Government, also play an important role in the long-term development of democracy in the country. Finally, it was found that NDI's positive contributions are tempered by a poor partnership with USAID that results in wasted energy and a limited view of the long-term goals of USAID's strategy. In its comments on the draft report, NDI acknowledged these problems and stated it would work to resolve them.

At present, NDI's program faces a watershed given the political trends in the country. By all accounts, democratization in Kyrgyzstan must now be viewed as a long-term endeavor. In this context, NDI must proceed by carefully considering its short-term goals in light of these goals' longer-term impact. While this situation does not require extensive change in the recipients of NDI's assistance, it may require alteration in the emphasis and content of this assistance.

In the existing political conditions, extensive assistance to political parties would be mostly futile. NDI's work with political parties over the last two years has had little impact given the tightening political environment, and presently only political parties that are at least in implicit support of the Government can operate actively.

While continued support to parliamentarians and civic groups is not as problematic, the short-term prospects for success in making parliament and civic group activism more effective must be viewed in the context of the long-term impact of these institutions on the political development of the country. Assistance to parliament and civic groups, therefore, should be less focused on immediate goals, which may not be attainable, and more on strengthening the skills and capacity of civic groups and individual parliamentarians devoted to change so that these people may work continually to keep the political space from further closing and play a pivotal role in the political arena when that space opens up at a later date. In order for NDI to assist in this longer-term goal, it must also develop a better partnership with USAID and other USAID implementing partners since these different parties only can make a significant contribution to democratization in Kyrgyzstan by sharing a larger strategic outlook.

The assessment's recommendations are provided in brief below, and a fuller explanation of them is presented at the end of the report:

Civil Society Programming

- *NDI should continue to provide intensive technical assistance to the Coalition while recognizing its contributions and limitations in the political process.*
- *NDI should assist the Coalition with continued training in advocacy.*
- *NDI should assist the Coalition with continued training in the implementation and presentation of non-partisan activities.*
- *NDI should continue to work closely with the Coalition on its organizational development and internal controls.*

- *NDI should make sure to balance training to the Coalition's central office with training for its regional offices.*
- *NDI should assist the Coalition to develop and implement a viable plan for future financial sustainability.*
- *NDI should gradually step away from the Coalition to reinforce its independence and maintain its grassroots character.*
- *NDI should keep in mind that the Coalition is one local NGO among many that has its own limitations and viewpoint.*

Parliamentary Programming

- *NDI should continue to enlist a trainer with parliamentary experience whose primary work will be with the Legislative Assembly.*
- *NDI should continue to work with select parliamentarians on constituency development and outreach.*
- *NDI should continue to work on ways for the parliamentary staffers to distribute information to the Kyrgyzstan population about the activities of the parliament.*
- *NDI should seek ways to institutionalize the public hearings to further foster citizen input in parliament.*
- *NDI should continue to offer consultation to deputies on important legislation.*
- *NDI should continue to work with the nascent parliamentary factions in the legislative assembly to better develop the factions' platforms and operations.*

Political Party Assistance

- *NDI should scale back its direct assistance to political parties for the next two years.*
- *NDI should explore opportunities, especially during parliament's recess, to offer more general training opportunities to all political parties that are interested.*
- *USAID and NDI should conduct a joint assessment of the political party environment in two year's time to determine whether advanced party building work is warranted.*

Public Affairs Programming

- *The "Nashe Vremya" show should receive continued support.*
- *NDI should work with Pyramida Television to help the station formulate a sustainable business plan for the show.*
- *In addition to NDI's technical assistance, USAID should seek to provide the present moderator of the show with training to increase his presentation and professionalism.*

General Operations

- *NDI should seek means to improve its partnership with USAID in strategic and programmatic planning.*
- *NDI should re-evaluate the process it undertakes in drafting workplans and quarterly reports in order to ensure these reports' timely delivery to USAID.*
- *NDI should develop a better system to track the progress of qualitative indicators over the period of its cooperative agreement and to demonstrate whether the objectives of its assistance are being met.*
- *NDI should develop a better understanding of USAID's long-term strategic goals and the roles of various implementing partners in the attainment of these goals.*
- *NDI must recognize that, while an independent non-governmental grantee, it is still part of a larger team in the U.S. Government's democracy assistance, and it must be a better team member.*

This assessment of the work of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Kyrgyzstan was conducted over an approximately two-week period between February 23, 2001 and March 10, 2001 in Washington, D.C.; Almaty, Kazakhstan; and four cities in Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek, Osh, Uzgen, and Naryn). The assessment team consisted of Sean R. Roberts, an independent consultant, and Susan Kosinski, an employee from USAID's Global Democracy Center.¹ In addition, Kate Head, an independent consultant provided by NDI, participated as an adjunct member.² In Washington, D.C., the team gathered documents related to the work of USAID and NDI in Kyrgyzstan and met with representatives of both USAID's Europe and Eurasia Bureau and NDI's home office. In Almaty, Kazakhstan, the team met extensively with USAID/Central Asia staff. The majority of the assessment took place in Kyrgyzstan, consisting of six and one-half days in Bishkek, two days in Osh and Uzgen, and a day and one-half in Naryn. In each of these locations, the team held citizen focus groups and conducted interviews with local NGO representatives, particularly with representatives and members of NDI's civil society partner organization in Kyrgyzstan—the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society (hereafter referred to as the Coalition).³ In Naryn and Uzgen, the team also held interviews with the local government administration with which NDI has collaborated on public budget hearings. In Bishkek, the team met extensively with the NDI field trainers in Kyrgyzstan and the staff of USAID/Bishkek as well as with USAID contractors and grantees collaborating with NDI, the Deputy Director of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in the country, the Director of Pyramida Television, representatives of several political parties, and numerous parliamentarians. The focus of all of these meetings was the political situation in Kyrgyzstan and the work of both NDI and the recipients of its assistance. Despite the short period allotted for the assessment, the team covered a wide range of interest groups and a broad spectrum of the political landscape.⁴

I. Brief Assessment of Political Environment in Kyrgyzstan

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the international community has placed great hopes on the development of democracy in Kyrgyzstan. With a Government that has seemed open to the suggestions and technical assistance of western countries and where the president is not a

¹ Susan Kosinski is a specialist in political process development for the Center who has extensive experience in managing democracy projects in Eastern Europe. In addition, Ms. Kosinski will be the Director of the Office of Democratic Transition at USAID/Central Asia as of June of this year, giving her a special interest in the assessment. Sean R. Roberts is an anthropologist specializing in Central Asia who had formerly worked at USAID in Central Asia managing projects in civil society development, but not managing the projects of NDI. He is fluent in Russian, Uyghur, and Uzbek as well as minimally conversant in Kazakh and Kyrgyz.

² Kate Head is a consultant in political development who has worked extensively for NDI in various locations around the world including Russia, West Bank/Gaza, and Egypt.

³ Only one focus group was held in the south in Osh. No focus group was held in Uzgen.

⁴ The assessment team would like to thank Jodat Murataliev, Kurbanychbek Sydybaev, and Aidin Nazekov for providing translation during our meetings in Bishkek, Osh, Uzgen, and Naryn and Volodya and Radion for their pleasant driving and company. In addition, we would like to thank the staff of USAID/Bishkek, Will Melara and Nataliya Raspezeza in particular, for their help in arranging meetings and finding drivers and translators. We also thank Scott Kearin and Sharon Rogers, NDI field trainers in Kyrgyzstan, for their participation in the assessment and their readiness to always provide us with more information and documentation. Finally, we would like to thank the many USAID grantees and contractors, NGO representatives, focus group participants, political party representatives, media representatives, and parliamentarians in Kyrgyzstan who took their valuable time to provide us with their perspectives on the political situation in the country and on NDI's work in political development.

former Communist Party First Secretary, but an academic and physicist, many observers of this small newly independent state have seen it as an *island of democracy* in a sea of autocracy. Unfortunately, as echoed by the country's political activists numerous times during the assessment, these proclamations of Kyrgyzstan as an *island of democracy* were premature. Recent parliamentary and presidential elections and their aftermath have demonstrated that the present administration of Kyrgyzstan's President Askar Akaev will go to great lengths to protect its monopoly of power, even if that means disregarding democratic processes.

The parliamentary and presidential elections of 2000 were marred by the arrest and disqualification of strong candidates and political parties that challenged Akaev's power base as well as by violations by local authorities and election officials at polling stations that ensured higher vote counts for both the President and his allies. The Government, by all accounts, muffled the press during the Presidential elections. Controversial news programs were shut down or forced into self-censorship, and stations, under apparent guidance from the presidential administration, often failed to air advertisements by candidates other than the President.⁵ In the aftermath of the elections, these acts of coercion have been followed up by the harassment, co-optation, or arrest of numerous political activists and the closing of newspapers critical of the Government. As a result, even the most optimistic outside observers of Kyrgyzstan must admit that its Government is looking increasingly like its authoritarian neighbors.

The roots of this political backsliding over the last several years do not warrant extensive analysis here since the history of Kyrgyzstan's ambiguous flirtation with democratization during the past decade has been documented elsewhere. It is worthy of mention, however, that forecasts during the early 1990s that Kyrgyzstan's lack of experience with sovereign authoritarian statehood and relative marginality during the Soviet period might lead to a democracy founded on consensus-based decision making from a romanticized nomadic past were overly optimistic. On the contrary, it appears that the lack of a tradition of modern sovereign nationhood in Kyrgyzstan has led the country in numerous political directions at once, making this newly independent state a site of contentious contradictions politically. The civil society community is drawn to American populism, the parliamentarians and political parties are attracted to Russian models of post-Soviet pluralism, and the Presidential apparatus has mostly returned to the Soviet strategies of *Perestroika* when controlled openness was tempered by repressive measures to stifle any serious threats to the status quo politically.

Our brief research into the present state of politics in Kyrgyzstan showed that these contentious contradictions are now fostering a dangerous trend. To paraphrase one interviewee's characterization of this situation, the country is heading towards a conflict between a Presidential apparatus in the process of political entrenchment and an increasingly disgruntled, suffering, and empowered population. On the one hand, the Presidential apparatus is closing the political and informational space in order to ensure that the present administration does not face any serious threats to its hold on power. On the other hand, the population, which is increasingly suffering in the context of the country's severe debt, underdeveloped private sector, and meager public sector, is growing increasingly disenchanted with the Government. According to a recent poll commissioned by USAID in the Osh/Uzgen area and Bishkek, the majority of people polled gave low confidence ratings to both local and national Governments, and in response to a question about the recent parliamentary election, only approximately 20%

⁵ One station manager noted that he was told that if he did not want trouble he should remove all controversial programming from the air and refuse to air advertisements by challengers to the President.

of those polled responded that both they had participated and that their participation was important.⁶

To add to the danger of this growing divergence between the Government and its citizens, Kyrgyzstan is under intense international pressure from all sides. The international financial institutions are pressuring the country to move economic reforms ahead speedily and to provide a plan for the repayment of its debts. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are increasingly demonstrating their ability to put pressure on the weaker Kyrgyz state. In addition to occasional off-hand statements made by the leaders of these states about the tenuous sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are reinforcing their borders with the country and withholding gas and electricity deliveries, both of which are a strain on the population. Finally, all of these external factors are exacerbated by what is becoming an annual incursion into southern Kyrgyzstan by Muslim militants from Tajikistan and Afghanistan who are focused on the overthrow of neighboring Uzbekistan. While the strength of this organization of militants, known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), is highly exaggerated by the states in the region, it represents yet one more external pressure on a country that is faltering internally.

In this context, the development of democracy in Kyrgyzstan is problematic. The ability of the parliament to provide a balance to executive power has been significantly weakened by constitutional amendments and the random use of presidential decrees. Political parties that publicly challenge the political monopoly of the President's administration are systematically dismantled. Independent media outlets are put under intense pressure to engage in self-censorship in order to avoid being closed. While a popular voice is rising in the civil society sector that challenges the arbitrary implementation of the constitution and rule of law, this movement remains too weak to force the Government to change. Furthermore, even if a popular movement could force the present Government out of power, it would be unlikely to have a democratic outcome, given the population's lack of political experience.

This being said, there are positive signs that a democratic state could emerge gradually as a new generation of Kyrgyz citizens takes positions of political power. In particular, many of those disgruntled with the state have been empowered by the public challenges to the grossly unfair elections of 2000 and are beginning to demand more accountability of their Government. The clearest example of this public displeasure with the elections was a demonstration and hunger strike in Bishkek that continued for weeks after Presidential candidate Felix Kulov's arrest. In addition, less dramatic signs of dissatisfaction with the conduct of elections have also been visible, particularly among the NGO community. If this trend continues to take root in Kyrgyzstan and become a constructive and peaceful dialogue between the Government and its citizens, it could serve to gradually open up the political space until a new generation of leaders can emerge. This longer-term perspective on the building of democracy in Kyrgyzstan, however, depends upon the Government significantly opening the political space and public dialogue by engaging the political community and civil society of the country and giving them a role in decision-making. Before such steps can be taken, a transformation must take place in the Government's concept of state power and its opposition.

At present, the Government fails to recognize the merits of Kyrgyzstan's wide spectrum of political viewpoints whose co-existence and interaction could provide the basis for a pluralistic form of governance in the country. Instead, the Government is trying to divide the

⁶ **Kyrgyzstan Population Familiarity with Diverse Aspects of the Country's Political Life, 2000: Survey-Based Research Results.** Professional Manager Consulting Firm, Bishkek, 2000; pp. 14-15, 19.

political space into pro-Government and opposition realms, forcing politically active people to choose a position in one camp or the other. Fortunately, many civil society actors in the country are taking the stance that they are neither for nor against the Government, but in favor of a better Kyrgyzstan where multiple viewpoints are respected and allowed to compete in the sphere of public decision making. This resistance by civil society actors to the Government's black and white division of the country's political space is one of the most positive elements in the recent political development of Kyrgyzstan. Popular support for democratic processes, however, must be expanded and sustained within the population in order to alter the present dangerous mentality of the Government.

This complicated and tense political environment provided the context for this assessment of the work of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Kyrgyzstan, and most of this report's recommendations are intended as suggestions for USAID and NDI as how to support those who are engaged in trying to open up the political space of the country. The target population and institutions for this assistance remain mostly unchanged from that with which NDI has worked for the last several years: NGOs interested in supporting democratic processes and the implementation of a rule of law, parliamentarians who see their role as representatives of a constituency and a particular political viewpoint, and political parties that seek to build a popular base of support for their political viewpoints. The assessment has found that all of these groups are open to technical assistance and can benefit from it, but the present political environment may require different emphases with regard to whom NDI should direct its work at different points in the next several years.

II. Evaluation of the NDI Program in Kyrgyzstan

A. Background

On July 25, 1997, USAID signed a cooperative agreement with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) providing NDI with \$899,552 for a 2-year program in Kyrgyzstan. The program included three components: Parliamentary Development, NGO/Civic Development, and Political Party Development. On July 16, 1999, USAID signed another cooperative agreement with NDI, providing \$620,000 for further work in Kyrgyzstan from July 1, 1999 through July 31, 2000. The program was a continuation of activities outlined in the previous cooperative agreement, but also included a women's political participation component as part of its political party training program. A year later the cooperative agreement was modified to add another \$550,000 and to extend the program for another year, until July, 2001. This extension included continued assistance to parliamentarians, civic groups (mostly the Coalition), and political parties. In September 2000, the cooperative agreement was amended again to add another \$234,404 for a pre-election assessment, voter education and monitoring through the Coalition, and an international election monitoring mission, all for the Presidential elections. This amendment and funding also covered five additional months of programming and operational expenses for the Coalition. The activities and objectives of these two cooperative agreements and their various amendments can generally be broken down into three primary areas: parliamentary assistance, civil society development, and political party development. It should be noted that, as signatories to a cooperative agreement with USAID, NDI is only responsible for its best effort in meeting the objectives of these activities.

Parliamentary Assistance

The objectives of the *parliamentary assistance* program under the first cooperative agreement were to:

- Assist in the development of a legislative process inside the parliament that is effective, open, and accessible to constituents;
- Help the deputies in the Legislative Assembly to establish a more efficient committee process and introduce procedures to make the work of the parliament more transparent;
- Help the two houses of parliament identify procedures to improve their relations with the Executive;
- Improve the professionalism and efficiency of the press service of the Legislative Assembly as well as the skills of deputies in communicating with the media; and
- Establish an awareness among deputies and staff of the principles of parliamentary ethics.

The objectives of the *parliamentary assistance* program under the original second cooperative agreement were to:

- Assist the Parliament pass new, reform-oriented legislation, including laws on ethics, non-governmental organizations and political parties;
- Support efforts to implement institutional reforms;
- Help the Parliament strengthen its relations with and access to the public; and
- Facilitate dialogue between Parliament and the Executive branch.

The objectives of the *parliamentary assistance* program under the present amendments to the second cooperative agreement are to:

- Strengthen Parliament's capacity to conduct public outreach and involve citizens;
- Establish greater procedural openness and effectiveness in Parliament; and
- Develop legislation in Parliament relating to the democratization of the political process

The objectives of *parliamentary assistance* under the first cooperative agreement were primarily fulfilled as deputies established a better committee process, improved and increased their contact with constituents, became better at communicating with media outlets, and established an awareness of parliamentary ethics that translated into draft legislation on ethics. In addition, NDI assisted in nominally improving the work of the parliament's press service. The 1998 referendum limiting the parliament's power, however, is one indicator that the parliament's relations with the executive branch during this time did not improve but digressed. Under the original version of the second cooperative agreement, NDI was mostly unsuccessful in achieving its goals due to parliamentarians' preoccupation with elections. Under the present amendments to this agreement, however, NDI has mostly met the objectives it has undertaken. It has helped parliamentarians dialogue with their constituents, opened up the parliament through the conducting of several public hearings, and contributed to the process underway of reviewing the draft law on the establishment of an ombudsman. In addition, NDI has helped to promote the work of factions and make them more effective instruments in the legislative process.

Civil Society Development

The objectives of the *civil society development* program under the first cooperative agreement were to:

- Increase citizen participation in public life, elections, and Government decision making through the strengthening of organized civic groups and initiatives;
- Improve the advocacy skills of the members of the Forum of NGOs (which became the Coalition) and of other select organizations, especially outside Bishkek, through training; and
- Assist select organizations in their advocacy campaigns.

The objectives of the *civil society development* program under the original second cooperative agreement were to:

- Promote the development, effectiveness and sustainability of the Coalition for Democracy and Society;
- Increase the capacity of citizens to influence the political and legislative process at all levels;
- Improve opportunities for citizen involvement in the elections; and
- Strengthen the institutional capacity of other NGOs.

The objectives of the *civil society development* program under the present amendments to the second cooperative agreement are to:

- Increase citizen participation and citizen activity to influence public decision-making at all levels;
- Continue to strengthen and institutionalize the organizational capacity and sustainability of the Coalition of NGOs for Democracy and Civil Society;
- Assist the Coalition with its efforts to promote greater transparency and adherence to law within the election process; and
- Work with young women leaders to foster their civic and political participation.

The objectives of *civil society development* under the first cooperative agreement were primarily fulfilled. During this period, NDI helped the Forum of NGOs field a domestic monitoring mission for the 1998 referendum that resulted in unprecedented involvement by NGOs in the electoral process. NDI also assisted the Coalition develop out of the Forum of NGOs and provided this organization with extensive training in advocacy and organizational skills. NDI's support of NGOs, however, was mostly confined to the Forum/Coalition. During the first year of the second cooperative agreement, the objectives of the *civil society development* program were only partially achieved. This was mostly due to the fact that the Coalition was consumed with preparations for the upcoming elections and the monitoring of local elections. As a result, with the exception of work with the Urban Institute on local public budget hearings, the Coalition did not get involved in legislative issues. NDI also did not strengthen the institutional capacity of NGOs other than the Coalition. Under the present amendments to the second agreement, NDI has achieved all but the last of its objectives. NDI has done good work in developing the Coalition's organizational structure, increasing citizen input on public decision making (particularly through the Coalition's participation in public hearings), and assisting the Coalition to promote better electoral processes. The work with young women leaders, however, was not fulfilled.

Political Party Development

The objectives of the *political party development* program under the first cooperative agreement were:

- Increase the capacity of political parties to organize and garner public support;
- Meet, on an exploratory basis, with the existing parties and political groups to review their plans for the March 2000 parliamentary elections; and
- Identify political parties for assistance and develop activities for this assistance.

The *political party development* program under the original second cooperative agreement consisted of two components: 1) party building and 2) women's participation.

The objectives of the *party building* component were to:

- Promote the development of nationwide, political party organizations; and
- Strengthen the capacity of political parties to participate effectively in elections.

The objectives of the *women's participation* component were to:

- Promote societal awareness about women's political rights;
- Build support and training networks of local, regional and national women activists; and
- Strengthen the relationship between women and political parties.

The objectives of the *political party development* program under the present amendments to the second cooperative agreement are to:

- Help parties to function as factions and caucuses in the Parliament; and
- Promote the development of nationwide political party organizations.

In addition, gender issues were to be integrated into activities to promote women's participation in political life and parties.

Under the original cooperative agreement, NDI's support in *Political Party Development* was able to accomplish its more modest goals, but not its first objective of increasing parties' capacity and constituencies. It was able, however, to lay the groundwork for future work by assessing the needs of parties and identifying parties with whom to work. Under the first year of the second cooperative agreement, NDI was mostly unable to meet its objectives in *Political Party Development*. This was mostly due to increasing political pressure on parties in the run-up to and during elections. In NDI's words, "despite the training they received, parties were generally deprived of worthwhile opportunities to implement organizational skills and use the electoral process to advertise their organizations and build support."⁷ Furthermore, while during this time NDI did help several women run for office, this assistance did not fulfill any objectives of the women's participation program. Finally, under the present amendments to the second agreement, NDI has only been able to achieve its first objective of assisting parties to function as factions in the parliament.

The remainder of this assessment addresses these objectives and the activities undertaken towards their achievement as they relate to the strategic plans of USAID/Central Asia for 1995-1999 and 2000-2005

⁷ **NDI Quarterly Report.** October 1, 1999-December 31, 1999.

B. Strengthening Democratic Culture Among Citizens and Targeted Institutions/ Increased, Better Informed Citizen Participation in Political and Economic Decision Making

Until 2000, USAID/Central Asia's strategic objective for democracy building in Kyrgyzstan was focused on the establishment of "increased, better informed citizen participation in political and economic decision making." The assumption implicit in this strategic objective was that the Government had the political will to establish a democratic society, and USAID could assist it in this goal by facilitating means of better-informed citizen participation in national-level decision making. A recent re-evaluation of USAID's program in Central Asia, however, suggests that this implicit assumption no longer holds since it is obvious that the Kyrgyz Government presently has no political will to establish a fully functional democracy and, to the contrary, is actively involved in forestalling such a development. As a result, USAID/Central Asia changed its strategic objective for democracy assistance in 2000 to "strengthening democratic culture among citizens and targeted institutions." This change reflects a shift towards a longer-term strategy focused on the cultivation of sustainable popular and institutional support for democratic processes that will hopefully influence Governmental political will as a new generation of leaders emerges. With regard to results, this shift pays more attention to establishing a sustained culture of citizen participation than to merely increasing the present extent of this participation. In this sense, it is a strategy that better reflects the comment made to the assessment team by NDI's Ambassador Ledsky that democracy building in Kyrgyzstan will require a generational change.

In general, NDI has played an important role in working towards both of these strategic objectives for democracy building in Kyrgyzstan over the last several years. Under USAID/Central Asia's former strategy, NDI played a significant role in strengthening the parliament as an institution through which citizenry could influence national-level decision making. This assistance entailed not only training parliamentarians in procedures and constituency outreach, but also included training NGOs in effective means of advocating their interests to the parliament. Collaborating with another USAID grantee, the International Center for Not for Profit Law (ICNL), NDI worked intensively in 1998 and 1999 with a local NGO umbrella group (The Forum of NGOs) and with parliamentarians to help them dialogue on NGO legislation and draft an NGO Law. In 1999, this work resulted in the passing of a new NGO Law that included many recommendations from this joint NGO-parliamentarian working group. Furthermore, NDI assisted the parliament with comments on various pieces of legislation, including the election code, and with establishing the legislative body's official procedures. Under the rubric of USAID's former strategy, all of these activities were effective means to the end of establishing precedence for citizen participation in political decision making.

In addition, from 1997 through 1999, NDI took advantage of several crucial political events to promote citizen participation and to make political processes more democratic. One of the most important of these was the nation-wide referendum of 1998, which put forth constitutional changes that, among other things, significantly weakened the independence of the parliament. During the referendum, NDI helped the Forum of NGOs organize public debates on the proposed constitutional changes and worked with other USAID grantees to sponsor a televised debate on Pyramida television. In addition, NDI assisted the Forum of NGOs to launch an election observation mission during the referendum, which cited numerous violations. While these activities did not prevent the referendum from passing by a suspiciously high

percentage, it did set a precedent for active citizen participation and public dialogue that has become more strongly entrenched in Kyrgyz political life since that time. Witness to these changes in the public dialogue on political issues was the ability of NDI's partner NGO, the Coalition (formerly the Forum of NGOs- see page 11 for a fuller explanation), to field a large-scale independent local election observation campaign during the local elections of 1999.

Under the rubric of USAID/Central Asia's new strategy since 2000, NDI has continued to play an important role by helping to establish a sustained culture of pluralism and citizen participation in Kyrgyzstan. Particularly commendable in this regard is NDI's recent work with the Coalition in establishing a sustainable organizational structure for this group that unites NGOs working towards democratic reform throughout the country. While the Coalition was initially dominated by the strong personality of its leader, Tolekan Ismailova, NDI has had significant successes over the last year in assisting the Coalition to make its governance structure democratic and its board of directors more active. With respect to USAID/Central Asia's new strategy, this work has made the Coalition a model organization in terms of governance from which other NGOs in the country can learn. While the Coalition still requires NDI's technical assistance in organizational development and in formulating a plan for financial sustainability, it has grown substantially and appears to be an organization that, with continued assistance, could remain active in Kyrgyzstan's political life into the next generation.

Likewise, the Coalition's election monitoring campaign and reporting during the 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections has served to keep a foothold in the closing political space of the country and force the Government to recognize NGOs as a socio-political force with its own constituency and viewpoints. During the assessment, we observed that the Coalition's election-related work had both raised the public image of NGOs in general and encouraged NGOs, both inside and outside the Coalition, to be more involved in political issues. In this sense, the Coalition is serving an important function for the civil society movement in Kyrgyzstan by continually pushing the envelope on political issues. Given the present political environment, however, the ability of the Coalition to remain active for the long-term is more important than the battles it can win in the short-run.

NDI is also contributing to USAID/Central Asia's new strategy through its sponsorship of a weekly public affairs program on Pyramida television called *Nashe Vremya (Our Time)*. This program, which has a large audience (it is the second most watched show on the station), broadcasts a live debate between political figures with opposing opinions. These televised debates play an important role in promoting democratic culture by encouraging the public and constructive negotiation of different political viewpoints. Furthermore, as was demonstrated in our citizen focus groups, the televised debates often lead to public discussions on political issues among citizens.

NDI's work in parliament under USAID/Central Asia's new strategy is playing a similarly important role. While the parliament remains weak and ultimately subservient to the presidential apparatus, the Legislative Assembly, which meets on a full-time basis and is responsible for passing the majority of legislation, is an active body that presents some challenge to centralized rule.⁸ Recent work by NDI and other USAID implementing partners in the Legislative Assembly has helped to establish a precedent for public hearings on legislation,

⁸ The other house of parliament, the People's Representative Assembly, only meets part-time and is mostly engaged in budgetary work. Furthermore, it has a reputation as being a more passive legislative body that is better known for "rubber stamp" decisions than for lively debate or decisions challenging the government's policies.

most recently on health care reform and the proposed Ombudsman Law. In these hearings, parliamentarians are offered the opportunity to hear the recommendations of NGO representatives, political party leaders, and topical experts. Other recent work by NDI has focused on strengthening the faction system within the parliament, which is helping both to establish a better-organized forum for the expression of different political viewpoints and to refine these viewpoints. In the long-term, the activities of these factions is likely to contribute to the increased sophistication of political parties through the refinement of their political views and practical experience in expressing and lobbying these views. By working intensively with parliamentarians, NDI is promoting a political culture that stresses the importance of constructive political debate based on an awareness of the many views and facts on a given subject. The open hearings in particular are providing a forum in which a variety of actors can take part and in which the varied programs of NDI in Kyrgyzstan coalesce. In this sense, NDI's work in parliament does not support an infrastructure for a weak and undemocratically elected institution, but provides training for potential political leaders and sets precedents for the effective working of a legislative branch of Government that engages its constituents and elicits citizen participation.

NDI's work with political parties, however, has been less successful than other activities in contributing to USAID's new strategy. While NDI put substantial effort into the training of political party members during the 2000 election cycle in Kyrgyzstan, this work ultimately had little impact either on these parties' performance in the elections or on their overall development. During the election cycle, numerous parties were not allowed to run or were substantially limited in their participation. While this situation was outside the control of NDI, it meant that NDI's training was only able to impact those parties whose implicit support of the presidential administration allowed them to remain active. This same problem continues with NDI's post-election training of political parties. At present, NDI works intensively with two parties, *Ar Namys* and *My Country*. While this work attempts to balance assistance to a party that has been allowed to actively operate (*My Country*) with support for a party that was disqualified from the elections (*Ar Namys*), it is only likely to have an impact on the party that remains active by keeping in the good graces of the Government. As such, this activity does not contribute to the long-term development of a genuine multi-party system but inadvertently assists the Government in its attempt to strengthen parties that support it and to weaken those that do not. This issue will be revisited in subsequent sections of the report.

Overall, however, the assessment demonstrated that NDI's work has played and continues to play a valuable role in progressing towards the democracy strategic objectives of both USAID/Central Asia's former and present strategies. At the same time, it should be mentioned that under USAID/Central Asia's present long-term strategy and the tenuous political situation in Kyrgyzstan today, NDI and USAID/Central Asia will continually be required to work in tandem to formulate strategic approaches to political development in Kyrgyzstan. Given the slow development of a democratic culture in the country, they should continually reflect upon where the "big picture" of political development is moving and, thus, approach short-term goals with an awareness of their longer-term impact. Among other things, this will require both sides working at establishing a better dialogue on programmatic issues and will require NDI to work at establishing a better overall partnership with USAID. This point will be elaborated upon in section *F* and in the recommendation section of the report.

C. Stronger and More Sustainable Civic Organizations/NGOs Engage in Strengthening Civil Society

One of the three intermediate results of USAID/Central Asia's new strategic objective in democracy building is "stronger and more sustainable civic organizations/ NGOs engage in strengthening civil society." NDI's present contribution to meeting this intermediate result is primarily realized through its work with the Coalition. The assessment team was most impressed with this aspect of NDI's work that has helped to make the Coalition a very effective group for influencing political and legislative processes, for organizing people around an issue, and for providing an example for the future development of Kyrgyzstan's NGO sector. The success of this activity is especially impressive considering some of the difficulties in the NGO community of Kyrgyzstan that emerged from the Forum of NGOs' transition into the Coalition in 1998-1999.

When NDI began working with the Forum of NGOs, it was a locally initiated umbrella organization made up of 148 NGOs loosely joined to represent the interests of the non-governmental sector more broadly. After working with NDI, several members of this umbrella organization decided to alter its mission to support democratic processes and monitor elections. In doing so, they also changed its name to the Coalition of NGOs for Democracy and Civil Society.⁹ As a result, others among the original members of the Forum left the organization in disagreement with its turn in mission and abandonment of its role as the representative of the larger NGO community in the country. While this situation caused some tension in the NGO community during the early period of the Coalition's new program, it was encouraging to see that this tension has somewhat subsided since the Coalition's exemplary and brave work during the 2000 elections. Even NGOs who had previously had or still have disagreements with the Coalition generally are pleased with this work and feel that it created a positive resonance throughout the NGO community of the country. Witness to the improved image of the Coalition within the NGO community, the organization has regained a significant membership base that is approximately equal to that enjoyed by the Forum of NGOs before NDI's involvement.¹⁰

In large, this positive change in the Coalition's relationship with the greater NGO community can be attributed to its increased professionalism and its democratic system of governance. By all accounts, the leader of the Coalition, Tolekan Ismailova, is a strong personality who has clashed in the past over issues with both other NGO leaders and representatives of international organizations. This situation, however, is only a serious problem if the Coalition is exclusively identified with Ms. Ismailova. Largely due to NDI's recent technical assistance, the Coalition, while still benefiting from Ms. Ismailova's strong and inspiring leadership, now has a sophisticated system of governance that gives the organization more depth while also providing it with an identity beyond that of an individual.¹¹ The NDI civic trainer most recently working with the Coalition, Sharon Rogers, has done a commendable

⁹ This past year, the organization changed its name once again to the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society. This move was taken as part of being a membership organization of individuals rather than an association of legal entities.

¹⁰ The Coalition now has approximately 150 NGO partners and 500 individual members. NGO partners can no longer be considered members under the organization's new charter as a membership organization.

¹¹ The assessment found that while governmental representatives continue to identify the Coalition with the personality of Ms. Ismailova, most citizens and NGO representatives understood the organization to be represented by local Coalition partner NGOs, members, and the regional offices.

job providing the Coalition with needed training and intensive technical assistance, while also holding them accountable for the same democratic principles and transparency the organization demands of the Kyrgyz Government. USAID, in particular, felt that prior NDI civic trainers had been less aware of the importance of the Coalition's de-centralization, which exacerbated Ms. Ismailova's domination of the organization. Along these lines, NDI should consider replacing Ms. Rogers when she leaves with another civic trainer who has a background in organizational development as well as in advocacy. This is especially important since the tension between the strong personality of the Coalition's leader and the organization's democratic system of governance still exists and continues to require the attention of NDI.

The Coalition's structure now includes a Board of Directors consisting of 15 members from throughout the country who are elected annually at regional and general assemblies of the organization.¹² The Board members have the responsibility of deciding when a new president must be elected, of approving workplans and project directions, and of approving the bylaws and procedures of the organization. The assessment found that the new Board members of the Coalition, still undergoing orientation, varied in their sophistication. It is important, therefore, that NDI continue to facilitate training for Board members in order to assure that they are adequately informed about their responsibilities. If implemented well, the election of the Board and the fulfillment of its responsibilities should present an important system of checks and balances that, in addition to ensuring the continued popular character of the organization as a true membership-based group, may give the Coalition political cover from accusations that its activities can be manipulated by outsiders.¹³ It also, however, makes the organization more independent which is an important point for both USAID and NDI to remember when trying to push forward their own agendas.

In addition to the Board of Directors, the Coalition's governance system is balanced by the involvement of its 7 regional offices (Karakol, Balykshi, Osh, Jalalabad, Talas, Naryn, and Bishkek). The regional offices are systematically involved not only in carrying out activities but also in developing policy and programs. Throughout our assessment, we heard from both regional representatives and the national office of the Coalition that this system provides the correct balance of local autonomy and central direction and oversight. The regional offices in particular play an important role in adapting the national objectives of the Coalition to the specifics of Kyrgyzstan's diverse regions. In doing so, the regional offices also provide for the organization's primary outreach to the public, recruitment of members, and engagement with a larger constituency. The regional offices that the team visited were fulfilling this role well. The central office, under the direction of the President and Board of Directors, in turn, provides the regional offices with a general plan of direction as well as oversight of the internal controls of the organization, which are also highly sophisticated and seemingly well implemented.

While the coordination between the central and regional offices of the Coalition appears to be without significant problems at present, this is a relationship that NDI should continually monitor. The strength of the Coalition depends upon this relationship, which must balance the promotion of a high-profile national agenda managed by the central office with the labor-intensive work of regional offices in developing and responding to local constituencies. For the Coalition to remain a significant force in society, the national agenda of the organization should

¹² 8 members of the board are elected at the regional assemblies around the country-one per each oblast' and one from Bishkek. An addition, 7 members are elected at the general assembly and can be from any part of the country.

¹³ This accusation was made several times by government controlled media during the 2000 elections

be continually informed by the needs and problems of its local members and partners throughout the country. If this happens, the relationship between central and regional offices will continue to be positive, but if it does not, one can expect to see tension in this relationship. One way that NDI can assist this process is to continue to offer training to the staff of the Coalition's regional offices. Training that helps these regional representatives to understand better how to link local problems to national issues and to mobilize local citizens to advocate for these national issues would be especially helpful.

In addition to exhibiting good governance, the Coalition has also become a force with which to be reckoned in the political sphere. The organization made a significant impression on the population during the 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections, and the Government's criticism of its work has only increased its popularity. With the exception of the Association of NGOs, an organization apparently constructed by the Government to counter-balance the Coalition, not one Kyrgyz citizen we talked to had an overall negative appraisal of the work of the Coalition. This suggests that the organization currently has the momentum needed to attract popular support and continue advocating transparency of governance and rule of law. In the aftermath of last year's elections, the Coalition has already utilized this momentum to undertake community advocacy projects. The assessment team, however, generally found the results of these projects to be the attainment of one-time forms of assistance from local governmental bodies that did not translate into advocacy for sustained changes. While this is expected given the newness of the concept of advocacy in Kyrgyzstan, it is an area where NDI can have an impact in the future through training in advocacy methods.

If these community advocacy projects did not have an extensive impact on Government policies, they did serve an important role in bolstering the Coalition's constituency and improving its public image both among citizens and local governmental officials. As a result, since the elections, the Coalition has been able to regain many of the members it had lost during the difficult time of Government pressure surrounding the 2000 election cycle and its aftermath. Given the positive impact of these activities on the Coalition's constituency and public image, it would be a mistake to discourage the Coalition's regional offices from working on issues of local concern. What is needed, however, is assistance to the Coalition in translating advocacy for these local issues into sustained change on both the local and national levels.

At present, the biggest challenges facing the Coalition and NDI's assistance to the organization are the Coalition's sustainability as an organization and its ability to keep both focused on its mission and aware of its capacity and limits. The organization's present workplan is extremely ambitious, and it still remains questionable as to whether the Coalition can muster the constituency it now enjoys to undertake the tasks it wants to undertake during the next year. More important than the fulfillment of this year's workplan, however, is the task of sustaining the organization and its activities so that it can remain a force in Kyrgyzstan over the next several crucial years. For the organization to survive the next several years, it will need to continue to implement its democratic governance, formulate a realistic financial plan with diverse funding, and preserve its image as a non-partisan watchdog group that defends the constitution and rule of law.

While not every NGO that NDI works with around the world need be sustainable over the long term, it makes strategic sense to work on this aspect of the Coalition's development since the greatest contribution that the Coalition can make to the establishment of democracy in Kyrgyzstan will likely be in the long term. While this comment is not meant to detract from the role of the Coalition in keeping the political space of Kyrgyzstan open in the short-term, the

organization likely will need to play such a role for the next several years and potentially for the next decade. In formulating a plan for financial sustainability over the next several years, the Coalition must seek to diversify its funding sources. To date, the organization has succeeded in attracting some support outside the funding provided by NDI. Nonetheless, most of this funding has been from US Government sources.¹⁴ While the Coalition is an important force in the process of democratization, the slow nature of this process in Kyrgyzstan would suggest that USAID will not be able to exclusively fund the group at its present levels for the full time that the organization will need to make an impact. As such, the group needs to begin now to seek non-USG funding so that it can prepare for the inevitable scaling-back of USG money. If the sources of outside funding appear to be limited, the organization may also need to consider scaling back both the breadth of its activities and the structure of its organization so that it can remain active for the long term. Given that the organization's popular strength is largely founded in its regional structure, however, it would be unfortunate to scale back this aspect of the Coalition's organizational structure unless absolutely necessary. NDI can make an important contribution to the Coalition's sustainability by assisting the organization over the next year in the work of fundraising and outlining financial priorities for the next several years.

Another key to the long-term existence of the Coalition is its maintenance of a non-partisan position in Kyrgyz society. If the Government is able to characterize the Coalition as part of the "opposition," its role as a watchdog organization will be compromised, and it will lose its ability to resist Government attempts to divide and close the political space over the long term. Furthermore, the Government would also likely use this characterization of the Coalition to shut down the organization. While *pro-Government* forces during the election cycle tried to paint the Coalition's political allegiances as *pro-opposition*, the assessment found that they were mostly unsuccessful. Coalition members remain adamant about their non-partisan position, and most politically active people in the population agree with these assertions. Nonetheless, this will continue to be an issue as the Coalition's activities challenge the presidential administration's stranglehold on power.

If the Coalition is to maintain an image as a non-partisan watchdog organization, it needs to be very conscious of its role as an honest broker. Understandably, given the political pressure the organization has experienced at the hands of the Government and its staff and members' emotional attachment to their work, Coalition representatives often have made public statements that could easily be construed as partisan. One example of this was the statement made by the organization's President, Tolekan Ismailova, at the parliamentary hearing on the Ombudsman Law where she called the Akaev regime "liars" and made other inflammatory remarks. If the organization chooses the path of non-partisanship and is diligent about representing itself as such, however, these problems can be overcome with technical assistance from NDI. Such assistance should include providing the organization's national and regional representatives with the skills to be more professional public speakers and to be aware of the bounds of non-partisanship. The training needed to transfer these skills is especially important given that the Coalition is frequently the object of Government harassment. Just recently, the Coalition's president, Tolekan Ismailova, was mugged outside her apartment and was beaten without being robbed, a likely act of harassment. In such instances, it is difficult for the organization to retain its non-partisan relationship to the Government. Nonetheless, if the Coalition can demonstrate

¹⁴ They have received grants from the USAID-funded Election Grant Committee and Citizen Participation Fund as well as from the Eurasia Foundation and the U.S. Embassy's Democracy Commission.

that it is an honest broker even when under such pressure, it will be far more effective in garnishing popular support.

In conclusion, the assessment found that the technical assistance provided to the Coalition by NDI to date has been of superior quality, especially over the last year and particularly in the sphere of organizational development. The organization's strength is in its democratic organizational structure and its members' zeal for their work. It has also grown exponentially with regard to its establishment of a popular constituency, especially through its regional offices. The organization, however, needs continued technical assistance in order for it to survive over the long term. Such assistance must include guidance on keeping focused on its mission and on developing a financial sustainability plan, training on how to better represent itself as a non-partisan organization and how to make public speeches more professionally, and extensive training on advocacy skills (both for the Coalition and its partner NGOs). Despite these areas where improvement can still be made, the Coalition is presently one of the most sophisticated non-governmental organizations in Kyrgyzstan. As such, if it can sustain its momentum and organizational depth, the Coalition is likely to have extensive impact on the future progress of both civil society and democratic processes in Kyrgyzstan. This being said, it is important that NDI remember that the Coalition is but one NGO of many in Kyrgyzstan, and should not be seen as the only voice of the people. Furthermore, all parties involved in providing assistance to the Coalition must continue to respect the organization's independence in order to maintain the integrity of its democratic form of governance. If the organization strays from the objectives of USAID and NDI, it would be better to cease funding than try to bend the organization's mission against the will of its members.

*D. Increased Availability of Information on Civic Rights and Domestic Public Issues/
Information on Domestic Economic Policies and Politics Available*

Another intermediate result of USAID/Central Asia's new strategy is "increased availability of information on civic rights and domestic public issues." During the assessment, we found that there are serious obstacles to the achievement of this result in Kyrgyzstan, especially outside Bishkek. Given that the country is virtually divided into four different valleys separated by high mountains and due to the poor state of the economy, information from Bishkek is a rare commodity outside the capital city. NDI, however, has been fairly successful in finding means to overcome these obstacles through local level civic education administered by the Coalition and through the airing and distribution of a public affairs debate show it sponsors on one of the most popular independent television stations in the country.

The Coalition and NDI appear to have been fairly successful in reaching a broad audience in their voter education training throughout the country during last year's election cycle. During the assessment, we met people from far-flung areas who had been recipients of this training. Our discussions with these people spoke highly of the training's usefulness, and we could sense that the trainees had gained a decent grasp of how elections are supposed to be conducted in Kyrgyzstan. The larger impact of this voter education training, however, is more difficult to measure. In comparing USAID polls from before (1999) and after (late 2000) the elections, we saw mixed results concerning the knowledge of the general population about elections. While the polls demonstrate a 21% increase in the number of people noting that voting as a proxy for family members was illegal and a more modest increase in the number of people who could identify the correct process for nominating candidates to the parliamentary

elections, they actually show a 12.5% decrease in the number of people who recognized that they could vote directly for members of the People's Representative Assembly and no change in the small percentage of people (6%) who understood that the parliament was elected through a mixed system of majority and proportional representation. This being said, our discussions with mostly highly educated citizens in focus groups demonstrated that the Coalition had played a role in raising awareness, at least among this segment of the population, of the ways in which the Election Law had been violated during the 2000 elections.

While difficult to measure, the assessment team believed that the training programs of NDI and the Coalition in local communities throughout the country play an important role in raising the population's political awareness in a context where many people have limited access to mass media. While the extended assessment team had a lively debate about the audience for these trainings, it was generally agreed that, for longer-term political development in the country, the large rural population that lacks the most information and is increasingly a target of much of the training provided by the Coalition's regional offices was a particularly appropriate audience. While the traditional passivity of this segment of the population makes such training labor intensive, Kyrgyzstan is unlikely to have a more open political space until such people begin to advocate for it. In addition, of course, the Coalition and NDI have targeted the more educated population of the country for their trainings, and this is also an appropriate audience given the respect they hold in local communities. It should be mentioned, however, that the educated population in communities is already well represented in the Coalition and other NGOs. One way to reach a larger audience, and especially the rural population, is to offer more training and materials in local languages (Kyrgyz in Naryn and Kyrgyz and Uzbek in Osh).¹⁵ Both the Coalition and NDI acknowledged this weakness and said they were in the process of addressing it.

The other primary activity of NDI in information distribution is its sponsorship of the *Nashe Vremya (Our Time)* television show on the Pyramida television station. This live political debate show has gained a loyal following since it first appeared in 1999, and it has been an effective means of encouraging public debate on and awareness of political issues. Our discussions with citizens, NGOs, and parliamentarians during the assessment suggested that many people watched this show and considered it to be one of the best available forums for hearing different political viewpoints. This was also substantiated by the director of Pyramida television who stated that it was the station's second most-watched program. In watching tapes of several programs to determine the appropriateness of the form and content of the show, the assessment team agreed that it was a well-presented forum for political discussion that touched upon some of the most important issues in the country and noted that it also exposed its viewers to many political figures with varying points of view.

The format of the show is based around a single political issue. It begins with a short news piece on the background of the issue, and it leads into a moderated debate between two public figures with opposing views on the subject. The appearance of varied viewpoints on the show should gradually help to break down the dichotomy in the country between *pro-Governmental* and *oppositional* forces since it demonstrates to viewers that there is a plurality of views in both of these supposed camps. Of particular importance in this regard are NDI's instructions to Pyramida that at least one program a month should be a debate between representatives of different political parties. If not already done, the team suggests that NDI

¹⁵ In speaking to recipients of this training, we also heard criticism of the Coalition's primary use of the Russian language for training purposes.

include debates between two supposed *pro-Governmental* parties or between two supposed *opposition* parties to encourage viewers to break down this dichotomy.

While Pyramida only broadcasts to a few localities outside of Bishkek (most recently to Osh), cooperation with USAID grantee Internews has also facilitated taped versions of the show being aired on independent television stations around the country. Furthermore, it is simultaneously aired in Bishkek on Pyramida's radio station. Nonetheless, the assessment team found that the program had little audience in the areas outside of Bishkek that we visited. If virtually everybody in Bishkek with whom we spoke had seen the show and spoke favorably about it, most people we talked to in Osh and Naryn were not familiar with the program. While this may be inevitable given Pyramida's restricted audience, USAID should explore ways of doing such programs in other localities whether through NDI or another implementing partner. One way to limit the costs of doing this would be to concentrate on radio since the costs of a radio debate program are significantly lower. If such programs were done locally in Naryn or Osh, USAID should also evaluate the need for doing them in local languages.

An additional criticism we heard about *Nashe Vremya* during the assessment was that the quality of its professionalism had deteriorated. This was attributed particularly to the change in the show's moderator. The program's former moderator became such a popular figure to the people of Bishkek through the show that she was elected to parliament. Since criticism of her replacement was often accompanied by statements by people that they now watched the show less than before, it is an issue that should be addressed. USAID, whether through NDI or another implementer, should consider providing training to the new moderator to increase his professionalism.

The primary issue facing NDI and USAID with regard to this program, however, is how long it should be directly funded and whether it can attract other outside non-partisan funds. Despite being a popular show that could be commercially supported, NDI and Pyramida share a view that there should not be any advertising since most potential commercial sponsors of the show have interests in various political issues and might seek to influence the program's content. The assessment team understood the merits of this argument given the confluence of political and economic power in Kyrgyzstan. Nonetheless, for the show to have an extensive impact on Kyrgyz society, it must continue to broadcast for the next several years. If it does, it could begin to play an important role in legitimizing public political debate and help in developing a democratic culture. In order to remain in operation, however, it will need to seek diverse funds outside assistance provided by the United States Government in the same manner that the Coalition must do.¹⁶ NDI could play an important role in facilitating such a diversification of funding by helping Pyramida to draft a business plan for the show to keep it on the air for the next five years.

In conclusion, *Nashe Vremya* is a very important activity at this juncture in Kyrgyzstan's development. It should be noted, however, that the program's impact remains limited by its restricted audience, its apparent decrease in professionalism, and its lack of diverse funding. These are all issues that NDI and/or other USAID implementing partners can address. An additional obstacle to the show's impact that remains outside the control of both USAID and NDI is the fact that even "independent" media in Kyrgyzstan remains beholden to the Government. *Nashe Vremya* was one of the controversial programs that were suspended

¹⁶ Like the Coalition, *Nashe Vremya* has received some different forms of funding from the USG. During the recent election cycle, for example, the US Embassy's Democracy Commission helped to fund the program. At the time of the assessment, however, it had not received funding from other non-USG donors.

through the Government's pressure on Pyramida during the presidential elections. Now it is back on the air, but it could easily be shut down during future elections or other crucial political changes. Along these lines, USAID and NDI must also recognize the limits to using television for the purposes of establishing public political discussion.

E. Enhanced Opportunities for Citizen Participation in Governance/Increased Responsiveness and Accountability of Government to Citizen Organizations

The third intermediate result of USAID/Central Asia's new strategy is "enhanced opportunities for citizen participation in governance." Given the lack of political will in the Kyrgyzstan Government to develop a democratic structure of decision making where free and fair elections serve to provide the population with a Government that reflects popular interests, this is one of the most challenging results for USAID to achieve in Kyrgyzstan. Nonetheless, it has a modest goal of gradually opening political space and developing a more representative system of governance over time, and there still remains hope for such developments. In this regard, NDI's work has played an important role in helping to support institutions that can facilitate citizen participation and in working with politicians interested in utilizing non-governmental input. In the past several years, this work has focused on the parliament (mostly the Legislative Assembly), political parties, women candidates for office, and the promotion of the transparent and fair conduction of elections.

The composition of the parliament itself has not been chosen fairly given the gross violations during the 2000 parliamentary elections. Furthermore, it remains largely subject to the will of the President concerning issues on which the Government is not willing to compromise. Nonetheless, the Government did not manipulate all of the parliamentary races in 2000, and several progressive parliamentarians were legitimately elected. In this context, NDI's assistance to parliamentarians rather than to the institution is appropriate.

The assessment team was impressed by NDI's work with parliamentarians and the sophistication of the parliamentarians with which it works. Despite the problems surrounding the parliamentary elections and the limitations on the parliament's independence, the present Legislative Assembly still includes a variety of vocal ideological groups including Communists, moderate Socialists, left-leaning populists, right-wing supporters of business development and economic reforms, and strict supporters of the status quo. The distinctions between these different blocs in the Legislative Assembly have been more clearly developed through the introduction of party lists in the 2000 elections followed by the formation of factions in the parliament. Likewise, while the Presidential apparatus still has the power to push legislation through the parliament or to bypass it altogether through presidential decree, the Legislative Assembly still presents one official forum where the policies of the state can be challenged and where laws introduced by the presidential apparatus can be altered.

In agreement with USAID and the U.S. Embassy, NDI has carefully crafted its assistance to avoid supporting the parliament as an institution, with the exception of working on staff development through weekly lunch seminars in conjunction with the Barents Group. Rather, NDI's technical assistance to parliamentarians has shifted primarily to helping individual parliamentarians develop better constituent relations through public meetings and outreach. Additionally, NDI is helping to facilitate citizen input into the parliamentarians' decision-making process by promoting public hearings. Finally, NDI has assisted in training parliamentary faction members in the skills needed for a faction-based legislative branch to

promote the ideological blocs in the parliament. All of these forms of assistance address important steps towards developing an infrastructure and precedent for sustained citizen input into the parliament and increasing the responsiveness of parliamentarians to their constituents. The work with factions is also helping to develop a clearer plurality of political views that can challenge the Government's division of the public political space into *pro-Government* and *opposition* spheres.

The parliamentarians who have received technical assistance from NDI demonstrate considerable sophistication in their political views and political skills. In attending a public hearing on the Ombudsman draft law, it was refreshing to see that many parliamentarians and representatives of NGOs were able to criticize the draft introduced by the presidency while providing realistic comments for its re-working. Among second and third term parliamentarians who have benefited from numerous NDI trainings and the experience of legislative work, the professionalism of commentary and its presentation was particularly impressive. While it was difficult to get parliamentarians to attribute the development of specific skills to NDI's trainings, they spoke unanimously about the importance of such training. Given the difficulty of measuring the impact of the training to date, it is suggested that NDI develop a means for evaluating these trainings *vis a vis* the learning of specific skills in the future.

While the parliamentarians we met appeared to be active and devoted politicians, the public image of the parliament remains mixed and even largely negative. In this sense, it is particularly important for NDI to continue working with parliamentarians on constituency outreach and on developing better means for informing the public of the debates actually transpiring behind the doors of parliament. In Naryn, for example, a group of citizens identified the primary usefulness of their representative to be a communication link to national ministries that are delinquent in the delivery of needed services, a mentality that, while not unheard of elsewhere, suggests that the population is not entirely clear about the actual role of the parliament. If the population is able to gain a better knowledge of the debates underway in the legislative branch and the role of their parliamentarians in the creation and passage of laws, it would be more likely that citizens will take more of an interest in who their representative is and which way he/she is voting on various issues.

In conclusion, numerous politically active individuals in Kyrgyzstan identified the Legislative Assembly as the last stand of pluralism in the country's Government and encouraged continued technical assistance to those in the legislative body interested in engaging the public in political debates. While most outside the parliament were not very familiar with the faction system developing in the Legislative Assembly, deputies of the Assembly and particularly those trained in Poland on faction work were extremely positive about the prospects of this system for making the legislative branch stronger, more effective, and more sophisticated politically. Given this situation, the team recommends that NDI continue to work in parliament and seek ways to intensify this work in the same areas it is already working. The important caveat to work with the parliament is that there are rumors that the Government may dissolve it, create a unicameral legislative body, and hold new elections. This would obviously create vast problems for NDI's program as well as for the democratic development of Kyrgyzstan as a whole.

Political party work done by NDI to date has mostly involved campaign training during the election cycle, particularly during the 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections. This training was open to eight political parties and focused on a different theme each week. In between sessions, the parties who wished one-on-one consultation on the given theme were subsequently invited to sign up for an appointment with NDI. In addition, larger more general

trainings were open to all political parties. While political party representatives told the assessment team that they found this assistance to be useful, the team felt that its impact on the development of a multi-party political system in the country was very limited. As already noted earlier, NDI's work could not prevent the Government from excluding various parties from participation in the elections. As NDI characterized the limited impact of their training in one quarterly report, "many of NDI's party partners were denied opportunities to register their candidates, campaign in their districts, and communicate with the public through the mass media, and thus expressed little need for training; instead, they organized protests against pre-election conditions together with other political and civic groups, appealed to international organizations for intervention, trained party monitors and defended their candidates and supporters against persecution and arrest."¹⁷

These problems, which prevented NDI's work with political parties from having a positive impact during the elections, continue today. According to its cooperative agreement with USAID signed on July 16, 1999, NDI originally planned to follow-up its election work with post-election assistance in organizational development and skills building for six parties with substantial potential for long-term growth: *Ata-Meken*, *the Democratic Party*, *the Social Democratic Party*, *the People's Party*, *the Unity Party*, and *Erkin Kyrgyzstan*. Since the elections, however, NDI has been able to work intensively with only two parties, *Ar Namys* and *My Country*, helping them with strategic planning, membership development, and understanding the role of political parties between elections. While this work is certainly needed at some point, it is not appropriate at this time given that several of the parties with potential for future development are still under such extreme pressure from the Government that they cannot freely operate. Furthermore, it is questionable whether NDI's present work with *Ar Namys* can have an impact given the pressure under which this party is currently operating. While we were conducting the assessment, for example, Felix Kulov, the leader of *Ar Namys* and one of President Akaev's primary opponents, lost an appeal against suspect charges that had already disqualified him and his party from the parliamentary and presidential elections last year. Likewise, the *People's Party*, whose former leader Daniyar Usenov had already been arrested during the election cycle from which the party was barred, was informed recently that the alternative and vocal newspaper (*Asaba*) run by its new leader, Melis Eshimkanov, had been closed for its inability to pay the fine for a questionable libel charge. Other parties under continued pressure include the *Erkindik* party, whose leader Turgunaliyev was jailed for sixteen years on a libel charge, and the *Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan*, whose leader Jypar Jeksheev was harassed continually during the elections and failed to be re-elected to parliament.

In this context, few strong parties are left with which NDI can work on intensive development. Among those we met with, the only party that realistically seemed ready for such work was the *My Country* party. Assistance to *Ar Namys*, with which NDI also works, can at best help this party evade some of its present harassment, but it cannot at this point help the party develop organizationally considering that it is presently excluded from the political process. While *My Country* is a sophisticated and critical party, it only represents one side of the political spectrum. More specifically, it is a right-wing reformist party that is pro-business and supports free-market economic reforms. While it has been critical of the conduct of elections in 2000 and has disagreed with many of the Government's policies, the party openly and actively supported President Akaev as its choice in the severely flawed presidential elections. It is likely that this sponsorship of Akaev has been the determining factor allowing

¹⁷ NDI Quarterly Report. January 1, 2000-March 31, 2000.

the party to continue operating freely. In a context where assistance to this party could be balanced with aid to some of the *opposition* parties, if they were not presently under duress, this could be an appropriate focus/approach for NDI's work. In the present situation, however, working with this party would give it an unfair advantage *vis a vis* others and, thus, not only potentially influence the result of an election but also indirectly support the Government's repression of the other parties.

Such assistance does not make sense for strategic reasons. It also, however, may be in conflict with USAID guidance on political party support, which was issued in April, 1999.

USAID's Political Party Development Assistance Handbook states:

The overarching goals of USAID political party development assistance are related to facilitating the democratic process in newly democratizing countries rather than influencing specific political outcomes. Promoting and strengthening the broader political process through political party development requires long-term support for specific organizational, behavioral, and governance aspects of democratic parties, rather than the pursuit of short-term electoral outcomes.¹⁸

Given the current political environment, such longer-term assistance is not yet possible.

Rather, any extensive assistance given at this time runs the danger of inadvertently influencing future electoral outcomes.

NDI, however, has been able to assist political parties in other more appropriate ways by ensuring their inclusion in the public hearings of the parliament and their participation in the *Nashe Vremya* program. This assistance seems far more appropriate at this time given that it can include a wide spectrum of parties and does not focus as much on the building of party infrastructure. With regard to more intensive party support, however, it makes sense to de-emphasize such work now in favor of more involvement with parliament and to re-evaluate this decision in two years, which would be half-way to the next election cycle. These issues will be further discussed in the recommendation section of the report.

A Women's Political Participation component was added to NDI's program in 1999. The program, as outlined in the cooperative agreement, was to promote societal awareness of women's political participation, build support and training networks of women activists, and strengthen the relationship between women and political parties. Activities got off to a good start in the first year of the cooperative agreement, with NDI hiring and training 9 regional trainers and a Bishkek-based project manager who kicked off the program with 45 meetings in as many locations throughout the country to discuss women's political participation. NDI then conducted, in conjunction with the UNDP Gender Development Program, a two-day seminar to train female candidates for the municipal elections, and organized additional smaller training sessions for female candidates who did not participate in the UNDP seminar. NDI developed a campaign manual and continued its joint training with the UNDP for female candidates leading up to the February 2000 parliamentary elections. As a result, five of the women trained went on to win oblast' level seats on local councils in Naryn, Talas, Chui, and Osh. USAID was pleased with the results and asked NDI to continue this activity.

During the second year of the cooperative agreement, after extensive back and forth with USAID, NDI indicated it would integrate women's issues throughout its program instead of conducting women's activities as a stand alone project. NDI's effort in this regard, however,

¹⁸ USAID's Political Party Development Assistance Handbook. April 1999.

was not extensive. During this second year of the agreement, NDI only conducted two isolated activities with women interested in becoming more involved in the political process. In May, NDI conducted a planning meeting to develop a network of young women political leaders, and it later worked with two women deputies to conduct a roundtable on issues affecting women, including draft laws on gender equality and family law. Aside from these two events, however, NDI did not implement activities under this program. No network of women political leaders was formed, and no follow-up was undertaken on the roundtable. While NDI's office in Washington claimed that work with the Coalition could be considered an activity promoting women's involvement in the political process since many Coalition leaders are women, the assessment team found that this work was not particularly focused on the promotion of women in the political process.

In conclusion, the assessment team found that NDI did not implement the activities outlined in its cooperative agreement aimed at developing a network of women political activists, and in the end such a network was never formed. NDI also did not fulfill its requirements of making gender a cross-cutting issue in its assistance in other spheres. NDI's failure to follow-through on this program contributed to eroding the trust between NDI and USAID. At present, given the political environment, it no longer makes sense for NDI or USAID to work in the area of promoting women's participation in the political process. USAID may instead consider funding a program to promote networking and advocacy among women's NGOs. NDI, however, would likely not be the best organization to implement such an activity given that its interest is more in the general promotion of democratic processes than in the more specific area of women's political participation. They, of course, could prove otherwise if they were to bid on a competitive request for proposals for such work.

With regard to elections assistance, NDI's most significant contribution has been the training of independent monitors. While NDI also trained observers for the 1995 parliamentary elections, the 1998 referendum on constitutional changes, and the 1999 local elections, its greatest success has by far been training the Coalition to help it launch large-scale observing missions during the 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections. In addition, NDI over the years has provided comments on Kyrgyzstan's election code, promoted public meetings and debates surrounding elections, and provided voter education training through the Coalition. All of these activities appear to have contributed to the Kyrgyzstan population's interest and participation in elections as is witnessed by the public demonstrations surrounding last year's elections. The activities, however, have not contributed to making elections significantly more democratic given that the elections in Kyrgyzstan have been gradually more flawed over the years.

An additional election related activity that has not yet been discussed is NDI's international election observation mission during the 2000 presidential election. NDI apparently fielded this mission because it felt that "an international delegation fielded by the institute could contribute to making the contest fairer and more transparent."¹⁹ In considering whether this international observation mission had such an impact, the assessment team did not believe that it served its intended role. The main reason that the observation mission did not have a significant impact was that the elections were already seriously flawed and the Government of Kyrgyzstan had already decided to ignore the international community's comments about the electoral process. Furthermore, there were already international observers present at the election from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), from the U.S. Embassy, and from

¹⁹ NDI Quarterly Report. August 1 – October 31, 2000.

other diplomatic Missions. While the UNDP deputy representative in Kyrgyzstan noted that the NDI mission helped to take pressure off of the OSCE as the only critical international observers, NDI could have played this role by fielding a locally staffed international observation mission as they had done during the parliamentary elections and as USAID had suggested it do again. Given how flawed the pre-election process was and how unlikely it was that the international news sources would cover it, NDI should have known that its more extensive and expensive mission would have little impact. Nonetheless, NDI still fielded the mission despite the concerns of USAID. This is particularly troublesome given its cost of \$100,000, a sum that could cover most of the Coalition's expenses for an entire year.

Generally, NDI's work in increasing opportunities for citizen participation in governance has had mixed results. Given the difficult political environment, NDI has made significant progress in assisting the parliament to retain some abilities to balance the power of the executive branch despite continual Government measures taken to weaken the legislative branch. In addition, it has helped to facilitate a substantial degree of citizen input in parliament. NDI's work with political parties, however, has had limited impact due to the closing of Kyrgyzstan's political space. Additionally, NDI's work was not fulfilled with regard to the promotion of women's participation in the political process. Finally, while NDI has done a very good job in preparing and assisting domestic election observers, its efforts to field an international observation mission for the 2000 presidential election had little impact and added to already tense relations between NDI and USAID.

F. NDI's Operation in the Wider Democracy Portfolio of USAID in Kyrgyzstan

At first glance, NDI's activities in Kyrgyzstan appear to be scattered across a wide spectrum of society and look not to be complementary. Given the close manner in which the office operates, however, this is not the case. Rather, as should be clear from the analysis provided above, NDI's activities offer a complementary complex of work that, to paraphrase NDI's materials, encourages the opening of democratic political space while preparing promising individuals and institutions to fill that space when the opportunity arises.²⁰ NDI's work with the Coalition has fed into the development of a more transparent and viable parliament just as NDI's support for parliamentarians has intersected with efforts to improve the Coalition's advocacy skills. Likewise, the NDI-sponsored public affairs program *Nashe Vremya* has offered a forum where all of the political actors with which it works can publicly voice their viewpoints and raise the political awareness of the population.

The NDI program has also consciously engaged in coordination with the work of several of USAID/Central Asia's implementing partners. The *Nashe Vremya* program and televised debates during elections have been assisted substantially by Internews just as NDI has helped Internews' partners with advocating issues related to the freedom of speech in mass media. One of Internews' partners, the Association of Journalists, for example, was included in NDI's recent organization of the public hearing on the Ombudsman Law in parliament. In parliamentary assistance, NDI worked closely with the American Bar Association/Central and Eastern European Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) on improving legislative drafting and now offers joint programming to legislative staffers with the Barents Group. In the reform of NGO legislation, NDI also worked closely with ICNL in the past and appears interested in doing the same in the future as the parliament is discussing changes to the tax code. Furthermore, NDI took an active

²⁰ **Overview of NDI Program in Kyrgyzstan**, p.2. Paper prepared by NDI/Washington for the assessment team.

role with all other USAID democracy implementing partners in the implementation of the Election Grant Committee and the Civic Participation Fund during the election cycle of local, parliamentary, and presidential elections in 1999 and 2000.

This being said, the assessment team also found several instances where NDI has had difficulty coordinating its work with other USAID implementing partners. While NDI, with the Coalition, worked closely with the Urban Institute in the implementation of local public budget hearings, this relationship proved not to be fruitful. Part of the reason that this relationship did not work was due to the political environment and the Coalition's increasing role in politically sensitive issues, factors outside of NDI's control. Given that the Urban Institute works with local governmental officials who try to avoid conflict with the central Government, the Coalition was not likely an appropriate partner for this activity. An additional problem in this coordination, however, could have been prevented by NDI. After budget hearings were held in Naryn and Uzgen, the Coalition issued a press statement that it had organized these hearings. This act greatly angered Urban Institute's local government partners in both cities who felt that they were the organizers, and it, therefore, soured the relationship between the Coalition and the Urban Institute. As a result, the Urban Institute has more recently decided that the Coalition's high-profile political visibility, aggressive approach, and self-promotion does not serve its purposes in this activity and has moved to working with other NGOs on subsequent hearings.

The weakest coordination link between NDI and other USAID implementing partners over the past several years, however, has been in the area of NGO development. This is not entirely surprising given that NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, as all over the world, are often involved in conflicts with each other due to the competition for funds and the clashing of leading personalities. In such contexts, international organizations working with NGOs often are pulled into conflicts between local NGOs, further aggravating the problem. Such a situation, in conjunction with differences in philosophy, have in the past created tension between NDI and the Counterpart Consortium (hereafter referred to as *Counterpart*) in Kyrgyzstan mostly with regard to the Coalition's relationship with other NGOs in the country. In particular, there was great tension between Counterpart and the Coalition's leader, Toleskan Ismailova, over the transformation of the Forum of NGOs into the Coalition, and the NDI civic trainer working with the Coalition at the time did not work to alleviate this tension.

The coordination between NDI and Counterpart, however, has improved significantly since the Coalition has developed its organization and has cultivated an identity beyond that of its President. It is encouraging to see that many of the member NGOs of the Coalition are receiving general NGO capacity assistance from Counterpart and that in Talas, the Coalition office and the Counterpart Civil Society Support Center are co-located in a common space. Furthermore, Counterpart trainers and facilitators were enlisted to help the Coalition with its regional and national assemblies, and both NDI and the Coalition were pleased with Counterpart's assistance in this activity. Nonetheless, there remains tension between Counterpart and NDI, and this tension must be addressed by both organizations if they are to positively contribute to the development of civil society in Kyrgyzstan.

In terms of programmatic issues, Counterpart's support of the NGO community and NDI's assistance to the Coalition are becoming increasingly complementary. Counterpart's work focuses more on the general capacity building of local NGOs and helping them to build local constituencies in communities while NDI and the Coalition are more capable than Counterpart in providing the NGO community with advocacy skills. While Counterpart provides assistance to both Coalition members and those who prefer to remain independent

organizations, NDI's work with the Coalition has helped the entire NGO community by creating a force within it with which the Government must reckon. Along these lines, the team also observed that there is a definite benefit of having both Counterpart Civil Society Support Centers (CSSC) and Coalition regional offices in various localities, especially if they can establish a good working relationship. The only place where such a relationship appears to not be working is in Naryn. While our brief visit to Naryn did not offer enough time to analyze the tension between the Counterpart CSSC and the Coalition office there, it appears that the difficulties are due to an obvious clash in personalities between the representatives of these two organizations in the city. Given that both of these local organizations are relatively independent of NDI and Counterpart, however, the best that Counterpart and NDI can do to alleviate this situation is to encourage cooperation.

A more substantial question is whether NDI understands the role that Counterpart plays in developing Kyrgyzstan's civil society. The assessment team felt that the programs of NDI and Counterpart taken together helped to establish a wide base of nascent NGOs around the country that, while increasingly grounded in communities and focused on local problems as a result of Counterpart's assistance, had become more interested in the national roots of local problems through the work of the Coalition. Comments by NDI, however, suggested that it continues to view the Counterpart program as politically unsophisticated. These comments mostly surrounded NDI's belief that Counterpart had been complicit in the Government's attacks on the Coalition during and following the elections and that Counterpart assists the Government by cooperating in the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), a process of which NDI and the Coalition are very critical. NDI should understand, however, that Counterpart's role in the NGO community is not to advocate a specific political viewpoint but to provide open-door assistance to all legitimate NGOs who wish to use its services. NDI's inability to recognize the usefulness of such an approach is troubling since these two programs together may have a vital and positive impact on the development of civil society in Kyrgyzstan. If the two programs continue to have difficulty communicating, however, they may ultimately have a detrimental effect on this development.

NDI's relationship with the USAID/Central Asia Mission (both the Almaty and Bishkek offices) has also suffered from numerous problems, leaving an impression that NDI lacks an appreciation for the USAID Mission as a partner in strategic planning. While the assessment team found that some of these tensions between NDI and USAID were dissipating due to recent increased dialogue between the two parties, the partnership needed to make NDI's contribution salient to USAID's larger strategy still does not exist. One USAID official even stated that "NDI generally seems to view USAID as an antagonist rather than as a partner and to view NDI's programs as entitlements and not part of the broader USAID strategy." In addition to NDI's failure to implement a women's program and its disregard for USAID's suggestions concerning the Institute's international observation mission for the presidential elections of 2000 (both addressed above), tension between USAID and NDI emerges from NDI's failure to engage USAID as a partner on many programmatic issues as well as on its monitoring and evaluation and its reporting. According to the USAID Mission, in mediating disagreements between USAID and NDI with regard to program planning, NDI has frequently gone to the State Department or to higher placed officials at USAID before fully debating the issue with USAID/Central Asia's Office of Democratic Transition, the office ultimately responsible for managing the NDI cooperative agreement in Kyrgyzstan. While such approaches to resolving disagreements could be appropriate when NDI does not feel that the Mission is open to its side of the argument on a crucial programmatic issue, taking such steps before fully debating issues

with the office at the Mission damages the spirit of partnership in which both of these parties should be engaged. Furthermore, at other times, NDI has appeared to disregard U.S. Government advice outright and act on its own. Such acts isolate NDI from its partners in the field and contribute to energy wasted on squabbles that could be used more effectively otherwise. While staff from USAID's offices in both Almaty and Bishkek remarked that recent increased dialogue had helped to instill new trust in their relationship with NDI, this trend must continue and improve if NDI is to become a real partner with USAID. Furthermore, given the damage created by what the Mission views as NDI's apparent lack of respect for USAID in the past, NDI must make a special effort to continue and increase this dialogue, thus rehabilitating its image as a team member in U.S. Government democracy assistance in Kyrgyzstan.

Another problem in the relationship between NDI and the USAID/Central Asia Mission is the timeliness of reporting. The receipt of NDI quarterly reports and workplans several months late has diminished the usefulness of these workplans and reports for the Mission's planning and monitoring.²¹ While NDI understandably may view this paperwork as far less important than its actual activities in Kyrgyzstan, NDI should also understand that receiving workplans and reports on time is essential for USAID to fulfill its responsibilities of reporting to the U.S. Congress. The timeliness of reporting and workplans from NDI could be improved through a review of the process for their compilation. At present, the NDI field office in Bishkek provides weekly reports to NDI in Washington, and NDI Washington must compile the entire quarterly report at the end of the work period before sending it to USAID/Central Asia in Kazakhstan. While NDI Washington understandably does not want its field office to submit workplans and reports to USAID without Washington's input, moving the responsibility for drafting initial versions to the field may save time and provide for more timely submissions.

On a more positive note, USAID/Central Asia noted that reporting from NDI, since it went from brief monthly and semi-annual reporting to more substantial quarterly reporting, had improved in quality. In examining recent quarterly reports to determine their successfulness in articulating the impact of NDI's work, however, the assessment team still found mixed results. On the one hand, the development and use of qualitative indicators as measures of impact in most cases seemed appropriate and particularly useful as a means of determining progress in political development. On the other hand, the manner in which progress towards these qualitative indicators was measured and reported did not offer any means for measuring changes over longer periods of time (i.e. from one quarterly report to the next) or for determining if NDI's objectives had been met. While NDI is only responsible for its best effort in meeting its objectives, it remains useful for USAID to determine if objectives are being met. More often than not, when objectives are not met it is due to external factors in the political environment that are beyond the control of NDI. Nonetheless, the fact that these objectives are not being met suggests that a new tact in programming is required or an emphasis in assistance needs to be changed. Improving its timeliness and quality of reporting could assist NDI to establish a better partnership with USAID.

In conclusion, NDI's program plays an important role in the general portfolio of democracy building programs that USAID/Central Asia manages in Kyrgyzstan. While not present across the board, problems in coordination and communication between NDI and other USAID implementing partners could lessen the impact that this program has on USAID's larger

²¹ Most recently, NDI's quarterly reports for activities conducted between April 1 and July 31, 2000 and between August 1 and October 31, 2000 were received by the mission only on January 10, 2001.

strategy for political development in the country. Likewise, a general lack of partnership between NDI and USAID with regard to programming, reporting, and strategic planning affects the impact of the Institute's work negatively. While these problems are not beyond resolution, they should be addressed now in order to maintain the spirit of partnership within the USAID democracy community in Kyrgyzstan and to establish a real partnership between NDI and USAID. This is particularly critical given that NDI's work has the highest political profile of any of USAID's implementing partners in the democracy field. Establishing a spirit of partnership between USAID and NDI in this context is important both to the protection of the NDI staff in country and to the establishment of an appropriate strategy for political development in Kyrgyzstan that continues to push the envelope on democratic reforms while not damaging the relationship between the Government of Kyrgyzstan and USAID or the United States Government more generally. Put more simply, NDI must recognize that, while it is a non-governmental grantee of the U.S. Government, it is part of a larger team in the U.S. Government's democracy assistance, and it must demonstrate that it can be a better team member. In its comments on the draft of this report, however, NDI did acknowledge that such problems exist and indicated that it was devoted to resolving them both with other USAID implementing partners and with USAID more generally (see Appendix B). This acknowledgment of existing problems and demonstration of intent to resolve them is already a very important step by NDI towards cultivating such a spirit of partnership.

III. Recommendations

The overall impression from the assessment is that NDI is doing a commendable job in a very difficult political environment. This being said, the assessment team also found several areas where NDI can improve its work. The recommendations for these changes are provided below and are divided into five sections: civil society programming, parliamentary programming, political party assistance, public affairs programming, and general operations.

A. Civil Society Programming

- *NDI should continue to provide intensive technical assistance to the Coalition while recognizing its contributions and limitations in the political process.* While the Coalition has greatly progressed in its professionalism and organizational structure in the last year, the organization requires continued technical assistance in various areas. As is further elaborated below in other recommendations, this assistance is critical to the long-term development of the organization with regard to its financial sustainability, its presentation and implementation of non-partisan activities, its skill level and professionalism in advocacy, and its ability to weather political pressure and potential changes in leadership and composition. This assistance, however, must take into consideration that the Coalition has a limited capacity to perform, and its long-term existence is likely more important to democracy in Kyrgyzstan than its short-term victories.
- *NDI should assist the Coalition with continued training in advocacy.* As illustrated above, the Coalition has developed a sophisticated understanding of both the political environment in Kyrgyzstan and of democratic processes more broadly. Nonetheless, the organization still needs to develop more sophisticated advocacy skills. Advocacy training might include information on both the strategies of professional campaigns and the presentation skills useful when trying to provide commentary to Government officials and parliament. Depending upon the time available

to the NDI civic trainer, he/she may even offer such training to other NGOs in the country who do not belong to the Coalition, especially stronger special interest groups and professional associations.

- *NDI should assist the Coalition with continued training in the implementation and presentation of non-partisan activities.* Particularly given the organization's role as an advocate of democratic processes and transparent governance in an environment where the political space is quickly closing, the Coalition still requires help with its professionalism and its ability to resist smear campaigns portraying them as partisan and anti-Government. Such assistance should provide the organization's representatives with the skills both to maintain a non-partisan position in their activities and to present these activities to citizens and Government as such. Training in the implementation and presentation of non-partisan watchdog activities could include various examples of such activities as undertaken and presented by other groups around the world, particularly successful examples from countries with similar political conditions. While study tours would be helpful in this regard, bringing in a representative of such an organization to do training in Kyrgyzstan would certainly reach more of the Coalition's representatives, board members, and members.
- *NDI should continue to work closely with the Coalition on its organizational development and internal controls.* While the Coalition has developed a strong and democratic structure of governance as well as rigorous guidelines for its internal controls, it needs continual consultation with NDI with regard to the implementation of these controls. This is especially true given that the organization is likely to continue to suffer the trials and tribulations of Government harassment. One form of harassment that is likely to take place will be public legal attacks on the Coalition's financial accounting, legality, and independence. While the Government can ultimately shut down the organization if it wants to, a strong system of internal controls and governance could be instrumental in forestalling such measures. Furthermore, it can be expected that eventually the Coalition will undergo the difficult process of a change in leadership. As with any organization or Government, this will be the true test of its viability. Depending upon when such a transition takes place, it would be highly desirable to have NDI helping the organization through this process.
- *NDI should make sure to balance training to the Coalition's central office with training for its regional offices.* Providing training opportunities for representatives of the Coalition's regional offices will be essential to maintaining the democratic nature of the organization and preventing the creeping centralization of its governance. It will also be important for maintaining the organization's present balance between its national advocacy agenda and the concerns of local citizens in various localities in the country.
- *NDI should assist the Coalition to develop and implement a viable plan for future financial sustainability.* While it is not suggested that the present economy of Kyrgyzstan could sustain an organization like the Coalition through local philanthropy anytime in the near future, the organization needs to think seriously about its future funding options. Such preparations for the future might include a financial plan for the next five years that would identify potential funders and develop strategies for attracting such sponsors. This plan might also address scaling back the Coalition's structure and its less important activities while focusing on the organization's top priorities in the event that such measures become necessary due to limited funds. An especially important aspect of such financial planning will be diversifying the Coalition's funding by attracting non-USG grants, which can also provide proof of the organization's independence of the U.S. Government. NDI should not

only help the organization to draft a plan for financial sustainability; they should also assist in the implementation of such a plan by helping the Coalition to actively seek other funding sources.

- *NDI should gradually step away from the Coalition to reinforce its independence and maintain its grassroots character.* NDI should gradually separate itself from the Coalition while maintaining a professional relationship including the provision of technical assistance. This will emphasize the organization's grassroots character and, in the end, make it more sustainable and active for the long-term. One step towards this end would be preparing the Coalition to receive a direct grant from USAID in the next year. Whether such a grant would be awarded or not, the process of preparing the Coalition for a USAID audit would force the organization to become more self-reliant and accountable. In preparation for the possibility of a direct grant from USAID, NDI and USAID/Central Asia should examine the possibilities of conducting a pre-award audit of the organization at some point in the next year. Furthermore, USAID, NDI, and the U.S. Embassy should discuss the positive and negative aspects of funding the Coalition directly through USAID.
- *NDI should keep in mind that the Coalition is one local NGO among many that has its own limitations and viewpoint.* While the Coalition is one of the most sophisticated NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, it is still a single NGO among many in the country. NDI must keep this in mind when working with the group both to prevent undue expectations and to honor the plurality of viewpoints in Kyrgyzstan's non-governmental sector. Given the political pressure that the Coalition is likely to encounter continually, it is appropriate for NDI and USAID to assist when possible in intervening on the Coalition's behalf *vis a vis* the Government of Kyrgyzstan. NDI, however, should avoid getting involved in ideological or other squabbles between legitimate local NGOs, the Coalition included. Along these lines, it should especially be remembered that the Coalition is not *the voice* of the Kyrgyzstan NGO community and that numerous legitimate NGOs in the country find it more effective to work outside the umbrella of the Coalition.

B. Parliamentary Programming

- *NDI should continue to enlist a trainer with parliamentary experience whose primary work will be with the Legislative Assembly.* NDI should continue to have an ex-patriate whose primary responsibility is work with parliament, particularly with the more active Legislative Assembly. This trainer should seek opportunities to expand technical assistance to parliamentarians and continue to avoid direct assistance to the institution of parliament.
- *NDI should continue to work with select parliamentarians on constituency development and outreach.* NDI's work to date has brought many parliamentarians to the realization that their strength is in their power to represent a constituency. This success should be built on by helping parliamentarians to improve their constituency relations. While it is realized that most parliamentarians do not have the resources to continually travel to their districts, creative means of engaging their constituents even at a distance should be considered. If local radio stations have the capacity to broadcast call-in shows, for example, parliamentarians might be encouraged to give radio interviews with stations in their districts by telephone. Likewise, parliamentarians need to seek ways to better utilize their local representatives in their districts to facilitate both their own popular support and their ability to represent the interests of their constituents.

- *NDI should continue to work on ways for the parliamentary staffers to distribute information to the Kyrgyzstan population about the activities of the parliament.* At present, the parliament does not have a very positive image in society. This, however, is mostly due to the lack of information available about the role and activities of the legislative branch. While the parliament presently issues weekly press releases about its activities, it does not appear that these releases are reaching the majority of the population. Strategies for distributing information about the activities of parliament should be explored which are at a low cost and, thus, sustainable by the parliament itself. This could be combined with constituent outreach, for example, by using deputies' representatives in their districts to post the weekly releases in public spaces.
- *NDI should seek ways to institutionalize the public hearings to further foster citizen input in parliament.* NDI has thus far been successful in fostering genuine public hearings in parliament (still not open-door, but by invitation only) on a variety of issues. This is a very positive development that is crucial for opening up the political space of the country and giving a variety of political actors (NGOs, political parties, technical experts, etc.) access to the political process. Given the positive reception of these hearings by parliamentarians, NDI should seek ways to get the parliament to adopt this process as a routine part of its discussion of any important bill.
- *NDI should continue to offer consultation to deputies on important legislation.* During the assessment, we heard positive feedback from various deputies on NDI's role in providing them with information on international norms for various pieces of legislation. This service should continue to be made available to parliamentarians who seek it, especially with respect to the provision of examples of similar legislation from elsewhere in the world. In this work, NDI may also find it advantageous to tap the resources of other USAID implementing partners (ABA/CEELI, IFES, and ICNL, for example) who may already have access to such examples of legislation translated into Russian.
- *NDI should continue to work with the nascent parliamentary factions in the legislative assembly to better develop the factions' platforms and operations.* The parliamentary factions that were recently developed in Kyrgyzstan's Legislative Assembly have the potential of articulating competing political viewpoints. In this sense, they are important to the development of more sophisticated political parties and to the development of a political terrain where opposing viewpoints are honored and can be debated through democratic processes. NDI should establish a systematic means for providing these factions technical assistance.

C. Political Party Assistance

- *NDI should scale back its direct assistance to political parties for the next two years.* This is not meant to suggest that NDI should no longer retain its contacts with political parties and no longer offer them any form of consultation. Modest support for political parties (as noted in the subsequent recommendation) is still important to keep NDI's contacts in this sphere. However, NDI should avoid offering sustained technical assistance to specific parties given the present political situation and the potential for such assistance to adversely affect the development of a multi-party system.
- *NDI should explore opportunities, especially during parliament's recess, to offer more general training opportunities to all political parties that are interested.* One way that NDI

could maintain modest support to political parties would be to add to the portfolio of the trainer working with parliament the responsibility of offering a series of general seminars to political parties during the summer recess of parliament. Such seminars could be formatted like those during the elections, inviting multiple parties to attend and offering the opportunity for parties to follow up seminars with one-on-one consultations. This modest support would offer all parties an opportunity to develop their organizations without risking NDI's involvement in the unfair over-development of parties that are allowed to operate in exchange for complicity in the present political situation. Representatives of political parties should also be continually included in other on-going NDI activities such as the *Nashe Vremya* program, parliamentary open hearings, and other informational gatherings.

- *USAID and NDI should conduct a joint assessment of the political party environment in two year's time to determine whether advanced party building work is warranted. After two years, an assessment should examine the degree to which political parties of all persuasions are allowed to openly and freely operate in Kyrgyzstan. If it is determined that they are, USAID and NDI should consider re-instituting a more advanced party building activity that could assist the political parties of the country launch campaigns for the 2005 elections.*

D. Public Affairs Programming

- *The “Nashe Vremya” show should receive continued support. This show plays an important role in the present political environment in Kyrgyzstan. In a context where the political space is closing, the program is a breath of fresh air. In fact, as noted in the report, USAID may consider reproducing the general idea of the show in localities outside of Bishkek and using radio as a more affordable media. This spin-off activity could be done through NDI, but it might also be an activity more appropriate for a USAID implementing partner working in mass media.*
- *NDI should work with Pyramida Television to help the station formulate a sustainable business plan for the show. While we agreed with NDI and Pyramida that this program must remain a subsidized, non-commercial endeavor given that potential advertisers would be likely to influence the programming, we felt plans should be made for the show's longer-term sustainability at least until political debate shows can operate freely in Kyrgyzstan. A sustainability plan would include determining what would be the show's minimum budget annually and determining what sources of funding outside USAID could be solicited to support such a project. NDI should also assist Pyramida to actively seek such outside funding.*
- *In addition to NDI's technical assistance, USAID should seek to provide the present moderator of the show with training to increase his presentation and professionalism. This assistance might be provided through a television professional from the United States, brought by either the Embassy's Public Affairs Office or by Internews, who could work with the moderator.*

E. General Operations

- *NDI should seek means to improve its partnership with USAID in strategic and programmatic planning. As already mentioned, there have been serious difficulties in the relationship between NDI and USAID over the last several years. While recent*

developments have shown NDI to be more open to discussing strategic and programmatic issues with USAID, this trend must continue to ensure that a true partnership be established between both parties. In particular, NDI should be more open to working with USAID on taking stock in its activities and reflecting upon their impact on the long-term development of democracy in Kyrgyzstan. Both parties noted that recent meetings to determine a “legislative index” measure of the status of Kyrgyzstan’s legislative branch of Government presented a good opportunity for such reflection, and the conduct of this assessment with NDI participation is hopefully another positive step in this direction. (See NDI response in Appendix B).

- *NDI should re-evaluate the process it undertakes in drafting workplans and quarterly reports in order to ensure these reports’ timely delivery to USAID.* NDI should consider, for example, giving more authority to its field staff in the drafting of quarterly reports to expedite their submission. (See NDI response in Appendix B).
- *NDI should develop a better system to track the progress of qualitative indicators over the period of its cooperative agreement and to demonstrate whether the objectives of its assistance are being met.* As already noted, NDI’s indicators do not offer a means to track progress over time, something that is essential for USAID in its own reporting and management of projects. The development of a simple matrix that provides succinct explanations of the progress made towards reaching goals during each three month period would help address this problem. Furthermore, the goals that NDI hopes to reach during each period should be more clearly articulated so that progress towards objectives can be measured. (See NDI response in Appendix B).
- *NDI should develop a better understanding of USAID’s long-term strategic goals and the roles of various implementing partners in the attainment of these goals.* As mentioned in the report, NDI has not always demonstrated an understanding of the various roles of different USAID implementing partners. The team felt that this was largely due to NDI’s strict focus on its own objectives and lack of understanding of how other USAID implementing partners were contributing to complementary objectives. A better relationship with USAID may help to facilitate a better understanding of the varied roles of implementing partners in USAID’s strategy.
- *NDI must recognize that, while an independent non-governmental grantee, it is still part of a larger team in the U.S. Government’s democracy assistance, and it must be a better team member.* As mentioned in the report, NDI’s problems in coordinating with both other USAID implementing partners and the USAID Mission suggest a general lack of awareness that it is part of a larger team. NDI must seek ways to resolve this perception by becoming more receptive to the role of others in this team and its joint objectives. (See NDI response in Appendix B).

APPENDIX A: List of Interviewees¹

USAID Staff

Stephen Nix, *USAID/Europe&Eurasia*
Glenn Anders, *USAID/Central Asia/Almaty*
Greg Koldys, *USAID/Central Asia/Almaty*
Katherine Stratos, *USAID/Central Asia/Almaty*
Sundaa Bridgett, *USAID/Central Asia/Almaty*
David Hoffman, *USAID/Central Asia/Almaty*
Igor Tupitsyn, *USAID/Central Asia/Almaty*
Tracy Atwood, *USAID/Central Asia/Bishkek*
William Melara, *USAID/Central Asia/Bishkek*
Natalya Raspereza, *USAID/Central Asia/Bishkek*

U.S. Embassy/Bishkek

Ambassador O'Keefe, *Ambassador*
Sheila Gwaltney, *DCM*
Peter Eckstrom, *Political Officer*

NDI Staff

Ken Wollack, *NDI/Washington*
Ambassador Nelson Ledsky, *NDI/Washington*
Laura Jewett, *NDI/Washington*
Katie Fox, *NDI/Washington*
Debra Cooper, *NDI/Washington*
Scott Kearin, *NDI/Bishkek*
Sharon Rogers, *NDI/Bishkek*
Mahabatt Baimyrzaeva, *NDI/Bishkek*
Aigul Baibosunova, *NDI/Bishkek*

USAID Grantees and Contractors

Chedomir Flego, *IFES/Bishkek*
Scott Lansell, *IFES/Washington*
Tony Bowyer, *IFES/Washington*
Chris Schaupp, *Internews/Bishkek*
Dana Frye, *Barents/Bishkek*

¹ This list represents the majority of people with whom we met. Given the number of people with whom the team talked, there may be some people inadvertently omitted. Nobody, however, was purposely omitted. The names of the citizen focus group participants have been left anonymous.

Kate Reikofski, *Urban Institute/Bishkek*
Charles Underland, *Urban Institute/Bishkek*
Hilary Smith, *Urban Institute/Bishkek*
Erkin Kasymbaev, *Counterpart Consortium/Bishkek*
Nurdin Sattarov, *Counterpart Consortium/Naryn*
Jay Cooper, *Counterpart Consortium/Almaty*
Yuri Khvan, *ICNL/Bishkek*
Claire Holland, *ABA/CEELI/Bishkek*

Other International Institutions

Yuri Misnikov, *United Nations Development Program, Deputy Director*

Parliamentarians

Oksana Malayna, *Right Faction/Committee on Mass Media and Social Politics*
Kabay Karabekov, *Right Faction/Committee on Mass Media and Social Politics*
Zaynidin Kurmanov, *Right Faction*
Marat Sultanov, *El Uchun Faction/Chairman of Committee on Budget and Finance*
Ishenbai Moldotashev, *Faction of the Regions of Kyrgyzstan/Formerly of People's Party*
Karypbek Alymkulov, *"Unity" Faction*
Ishenbai Kadyrbekov, *ElKomSots Faction*
Adakhmadumarov, *ElKomSots Faction*

Local Government Officials

MukhammadJan Nosirov, *Uzgen Vice Mayor*
Asanbek Kermakunov, *Mayor of Naryn*

Political Party Representatives

Melis Eshimkanov, *People's Party*
Joomart Otorbaev, *My Country Party*
Galina Kulikova, *My Country Party*
Dosmir Uzbekov, *My Country Party*
Emil Aliyev, *Ar Namys Party*
Urmat Sovetov, *Ar Namys Party*
(*We also met other people from political parties that are represented in parliament*)

Mass Media

Andrey Tsvetkov, *Director, Pyramida Television*

Kuban Mambetaliev, *Representative, Association “Journalists” Kyrgyzstan*
Alisher Khamidov, *Osh Media Resource Center*

Citizen Focus Groups (Purposely no names were taken)

Bishkek (students)
Osh (lawyers, teachers, and students)
Naryn (teachers)

Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society

Tolekan Ismailova, *President*
Ykybal Adnaeva, *Coalition Office, Bishkek*
Elfrida Yausheva, *Coalition Office, Bishkek*
Aziza Yuldasheva, *Board Member in Osh*
Mansur Baratov, *Coalition Office, Osh*
Myskal Tashmatova, *Coalition Office, Osh*
Albina Alimova, *Coalition Office, Karakol*
Roza Jumaeva, *Coalition Office, Naryn*
Karamat Orozova, *Coalition Office, Batken Oblas*

Other Local NGOs (both members and non-members of the Coalition)

Egemberdi Sydykov, *Talas Oblast Farmers’ Association*
Erkin Nurmamatov, *Fund for Legal and Economic Reform, (Osh)*
Rustamjan Akhmatakhunov, *Osh Union of NGOs*
Anipa Musaeva, *“Kol-Kabysh,” (Naryn)*
Svetlana Sayakbaeva, *“Tendesh,” (Naryn)*
Aigul Jumakanova, *Women’s Intellectual Club, (Naryn)*
Marat Eshkulov, *“Egemen,” (Naryn)*
Islam Imanaliev, *Initiative Group “Demilge,” (Naryn)*
Arzygul Yuldasheva, *Initiative Group “Yntymak,” (Naryn)*
Aigul Ibraeva, *“Ak-Sary,” (Naryn)*
Toktoim Umetalieva, *Association of NGOs, (Bishkek)*
Asya Sasykbayeva, *Interbilim (Bishkek)*
Aman Sarmanov, *Aikyn (Bishkek)*
Shamil Sharshok Uulu, *Jash Ordo (Bishkek)*
Ainagul Isakova, *Association of Family Doctors (Bishkek)*
Kachaeva Irina, *Association of Accountants (Bishkek)*

Participants in NDI's Women in Politics Training

Agahon Turgunbaeva, *Osh Oblast' Administration Family Protection Department*

Batina Bagishova, *Center for Women's Initiatives "Ayalzat." (Osh)*

Parizat Shukuova, *"Batam" Collective (Osh)*

Avazhan Ormonova, *Social Fund "Businesswomen" (Osh)*

Gulnar Sybulaeva, *Social Fund (Osh)*

Nurzhan Bardinova, *Social Fund "Businesswomen" (Osh)*

Myskal Toshmatova, *Social Fund "Myskal" (Osh)*

Tazakul Zakirova, *International Association of Women "Nasiyat." (Osh)*

Bubusara Ryskulova, *crises center "Sezim"(Osh)*

Natalya Busar, *Ar Namys (Bishkek)*

Gulnara Aitbaeva, *Bishkek's women center (Bishkek)*

Tynara Dzhumabaeva, *Unemployed Fund (Bishkek)*

APPENDIX B: NDI's Comments to the Draft Report

Memorandum

To: Sean Roberts
From: Ken Wollack, Nelson Ledsky
Date: April 19, 2001
Re: Response to Draft Assessment on NDI Programs in Kyrgyzstan
Cc: USAID/CAR, Susan Kosinski

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the draft assessment of NDI programs in Kyrgyzstan. NDI is pleased with the assessors' confirmation that it has performed commendably in a difficult political environment and that it has come to play an important role in Kyrgyzstan as one of the international organizations most aggressively pushing the envelope to keep the country's political space from further closing. NDI finds itself in substantial agreement with the assessment's recommendations for future programming, with a few minor exceptions. The Institute takes seriously the commentary on the need to further improve relations between USAID and NDI and pledges to make a genuine effort in this direction. This response seeks to provide context for and clarification on some of the issues raised.

Civil Society Programming

NDI appreciates the assessors' conclusion that NDI's technical assistance to the Coalition of NGOs for Democracy and Civil Society (the Coalition), "has been of superior quality, especially over the last year and particularly in the sphere of organizational development." The Institute also concurs in the assessors' specific recommendations regarding the direction of NDI's future technical assistance to the Coalition. NDI appreciates the diverse accomplishments and viewpoints of the various NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, including the Coalition and the assessors' reminder in this regard is well taken.

The report devotes considerable space to NDI's relationship to the Urban Institute (UI) and the Counterpart Consortium. NDI regrets the friction with UI over the Coalition's statement on the organization of budget hearings. As the assessors note, the Coalition still needs assistance in professionalizing its operations. Immediately following that incident and subsequently, NDI has worked closely with Tolekan Ismailova and other Coalition leaders on these goals.

NDI does recognize the value of the Counterpart Consortium and the Counterpart Civil Society Support Centers (CCSC). During the elections period, the government, while attacking the Coalition almost continuously, also sought to cast itself as supportive of the civic sector generally. Its goals were to isolate the Coalition and to promote its own Association of NGOs, which as the assessors' note, was a government-created group. NDI and the Coalition felt it important that influential NGOs such as Counterpart not take a political position, but merely distance themselves from this activity by the government.

This in no way indicates that NDI does not acknowledge Counterpart's long-term contribution to developing civil society in Kyrgyzstan. The Institute fully supports Counterpart's role as defined by the assessors, i.e. "to provide open-door assistance to all legitimate NGOs" through "general capacity building and helping (local NGOs) to build local constituencies." NDI believes it can also assist the Coalition in capacity and constituency building where this is a natural component of organizational development and advocacy training.

NDI is pleased that it was able to call upon Counterpart to facilitate and train at the NGO conference the Coalition organized in July and the Coalition's national and regional assemblies. It looks forward to continuing to work constructively with Counterpart in the future.

The assessors refer to an "inevitable scaling back of U.S. government funding" and emphasizes the need for the Coalition to diversify its funding. NDI acknowledges the limits of U.S. government monies and the need for the Coalition to diversify its funding. The Institute will continue to assist the Coalition in its fundraising efforts as well as in its attempt to prioritize activities in recognition of potential funding limitations.

At the same time, NDI wishes to sound a note of caution about "scaling back" the Coalition's activities. It is the Coalition's structure as a collection of nationally coordinated NGOs that renders it effective. The Coalition's breadth of support, including its 150 NGO and 500 individuals members, is what has enabled it to "force the Government to recognize NGOs as a socio-political force with [their] own constituency and viewpoints," in the words of the assessment.

NDI would like to raise one other issue related to the Coalition for further discussion with the Mission. The assessment report suggests in several places that the Coalition's long-term existence is likely more important to democracy in Kyrgyzstan than its short-term victories. This statement has merit, but it is also open to debate. One could also argue that the Coalition, as it currently exists, might no longer be necessary in 10 years, either because Kyrgyzstan had reverted to a strictly authoritarian regime, or because democracy has advanced significantly. The organization's mission would have been overtaken by other events. Indeed, it is common for civic groups, particularly large coalitions brought together for a specific purpose, to undergo changes, and even deliberately dissolve, as circumstances unfold. Under these scenarios, a legitimate case can be made that the Coalition's window of opportunity for having a real effect on politics in Kyrgyzstan may not be open indefinitely. NDI would thus hope for a more balanced approach to the question of whether to focus on long-term sustainability or short-term impact.

Parliamentary Programming

NDI appreciates the assessors' acknowledgement of NDI's successes in this arena, as well as their sensitivity to the difficulties inherent in this work. NDI agrees with the report's recommendations and will endeavor to follow them.

Political Party Assistance

NDI concurs with the assessors' conclusion that political party work should have a lower priority than civic and parliamentary programs over the next two years. NDI would propose maintaining close contact with political party activists and offering quiet, low-cost consultations. As the report suggests, a general series of seminars may be offered to all interested parties. The Institute is prepared to conduct a joint assessment of party development in two years to determine if more advanced programming is warranted.

As the assessment report generally argues that a long-term view of democracy development in Kyrgyzstan is warranted, NDI wishes to emphasize its belief that political party work should remain a part of NDI's and USAID's democracy portfolio, even if it ranks behind other categories of programs. Political parties play a critical intermediary role in the process of democratization, as well as in the functioning of established democracies. The fact that parties are weak and marginal in Kyrgyzstan at the moment would argue for continued support.

NDI provides assistance to political parties in many countries around the world where they are not yet able to participate actively in the political process. The point of these efforts is not so much to help the parties perform well in a particular election – although elections tend to provide an excellent vehicle for organizing – or to have an immediate impact on the political system, but rather to give political party activists the skills to assume positions of responsibility should new opportunities for participation arise in the future. Therefore, NDI believes that it can provide meaningful assistance to parties with modest resources. Here again, NDI would encourage a more balanced approach to the question of whether to focus on short-term impact or longer-term potential.

Public Affairs Programming

NDI supports the assessors' findings and recommendations on public affairs programming.

Women's Political Participation

NDI is concerned to learn that questions concerning programs to promote women's political participation have led to an erosion of trust between NDI and USAID. As the assessment report accurately notes, NDI enthusiastically pursued a separate program devoted to mobilizing women's political activism starting in 1999. NDI dropped women's participation as a separate programming component only when it became clear that NDI's overall funding for 2000-2001 would decrease, with no corresponding reduction in program expectations from AID. NDI pledged instead to try to incorporate activities targeted at women into the remaining parliamentary, civic and party building projects, recognizing that this was not an optimal position. Indeed, it is much more difficult to point to achievements in this sphere under the 2000-2001 agreement than it was in 1999-2000, when there was a dedicated women's program. The political party program activity of promoting a young women's leadership network, for example, is one area where NDI has not met the objectives it set for itself in 2000-2001. However, NDI will work to rebuild whatever trust has been lost over this issue through improved communication with USAID in the future.

Election-Related Activities in 2000

NDI would like to provide some context concerning its election observation activities in Kyrgyzstan. As is typically the case, the Institute sought to organize its pre-election delegation and election observer team in conjunction with its support for domestic nonpartisan observation efforts and its encouragement to parties that were participating in the election process. The Coalition and a number of political contestants had requested that NDI send a pre-election delegation, as it had for the 2000 parliamentary elections, and an election observer delegation, because these activities would reinforce and provide encouragement for their efforts. NDI also communicated in advance with the OSCE/ODIHR and was encouraged to send teams, so that it would be clear that the international community, both intergovernmental and nongovernmental, spoke in harmony about the unacceptable nature of the process. The Institute regrets, however, that the observation missions contributed to tensions between NDI and the Mission and recognizes that legitimate arguments could have been made against fielding these missions.

General Operations

NDI regards seriously the assessment report's concerns about the nature of the partnership between USAID and NDI. The Institute appreciates the acknowledgements of improvements in this area, and pledges to make increased efforts at promoting communication and cooperation. Following are responses to selected recommendations.

- *NDI should seek means to improve their partnerships with USAID in strategic and programmatic planning.* NDI will engage in serious consultations on strategic and programmatic issues with USAID. NDI welcomes input on how best to take stock of its activities and reflect upon the long-term development of democracy in Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, this assessment report has provided useful and objective insight.
- *NDI should reevaluate the process it undertakes in drafting workplans and quarterly reports in order to ensure these reports' timely delivery to USAID.* NDI is in the process of reevaluating its reporting process, as well as contributing more resources to this effort, and pledges a smoother and more timely submission schedule in the future.
- *NDI should develop a better system to track the progress of their qualitative indicators of the period of their cooperative agreement and to demonstrate whether the objectives of their assistance are being met.* NDI appreciates the need to improve procedures for monitoring the progress of its programs and commits itself to devising a monitoring and evaluation plan that will meet the standards of the AID Mission.
- *NDI must recognize that it is part of a larger team in the U.S. Government's democracy assistance, and it must be a better team member.* NDI, as a nongovernmental organization, operates in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere under assistance mechanisms (grants or cooperative agreements). At the same time, NDI recognizes that it is only one of several U.S. organizations working within a larger Mission strategy in Kyrgyzstan. This partnership, understandably, requires greater consultation on the part of NDI. Therefore,

the Institute is committed to enhancing its efforts to establish a broader consultation process with AID and other partners of the Mission.

NDI wishes again to thank the AID Mission and the assessment team for this thorough and thoughtful evaluation. The Institute's programs and relationships will, in our view, benefit measurably from the team's findings and recommendations.