

Report Expert meeting Intra-party democracy

Date: 12 April 2007

Venue: NIMD Office, Passage 31, The Hague

Invited participants: Sef Ashiagbor (NDI), James Gomez (IDEA), Dr. Katak Malla (University of Stockholm), Dr. Ghia Nodia (Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development), Dr. Leticia Ruiz (Universidad de Salamanca), Prof. Mohamed Salih (ISS), Dr. Susan Scarrow (University of Houston), Sari Varpama (Demo Finland)

NIMD participants: Wim Bakker, Maarten van den Berg (Knowledge Centre), Jan Willem Bertens (Supervisory Council), Anne de Boer (Supervisory Council), Okke Bouwman, Marieke van Doorn, Jos van Gennip (Board), Pepijn Gerrits, Lotte ten Hoove, Ellen van Koppen, Dr. Augustine Magolowondo (ESARP), Jeroen Mimpen (Knowledge Centre), Renier Nijskens (ESARP), Sylva van Rosse, Jan Tuit, Karel de Vries, Alan Wall (Knowledge Centre)

Other participants: Josh Maiyo (University of Leiden), Ronald Rodenhuis (Aalborg University Denmark)

1. Introduction

One of the objectives of the new NIMD Knowledge Centre is to strengthen knowledge sharing among democratization practitioners, academics and other experts, in order to increase our understanding of democratization issues in our partner countries. The theme of intra-party democracy is one of the pilot studies of the Knowledge Centre and is therefore an excellent theme to further discuss with leading experts and practitioners. Especially since there does not seem to be extensive and systematic knowledge on intra-party democratization practices, a combined effort in a knowledge-sharing network could lead to better practices and strategies and more coherent approach to this issue.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the expert meeting were as follows:

- To identify the main challenges on intra-party democracy.
- To exchange experiences on working with political parties on their internal democratization.
- To set up an international network for future knowledge sharing on intra-party democracy.

Specific questions on the theme included:

- How can leadership election be implemented democratically, without causing a party split or other negative side effects?
- How can underrepresented groups be included most effectively in a political party?
- How can candidate selection procedures be organized most democratically?
- How can parties benefit from party-wide participation in the construction of political programmes or party manifestos?

It has been attempted to address each of these questions during the expert meeting. Three themes were selected to guide the three break-away sessions: leadership & stability, candidate selection & inclusivity, and participation & party programmes.

3. Session 1: Identification of main challenges

Prof. Mohamed Salih from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) opened the first session by identifying the main challenges parties in Africa – as well as many other regions of the world – face. He elaborated on the lacking institutionalization of parties, on the dominance of elites, on the lack of inclusion of women and youth, the effects of patronage, the lack of accountability of leadership, a lack of participation of grass roots, and on the non-competitiveness of the selection of leaders and candidates. These problems are widely related to the state and development of democracy at large and are therefore necessary to address in any democratization strategy.

You should, indeed, make intra-party democratization subject to the societal transition to democracy, argued Dr. Susan Scarrow (University of Houston), continuing the elaboration of Prof. Salih. This means that internal party democratization is not a goal as such but should have positive effects on the state and development of democracy in society. Intra-party democracy may also entail some risks. Overly or too rapidly opening up of candidate selection procedures may create instability and might not strengthen the party's electioneering capacity. Furthermore, parties may not want to expose their dirty laundry. Therefore, intra-party democracy should always be seen in the light of party leaders' interests. Without their consent and support, nothing can really change. The challenge is therefore, to make intra-party democratization beneficial to party leaders, party members or followers, and democracy at large.

Furthermore, Dr. Augustine Magolowondo (NIMD) argued, we should not move too rapidly in trying to democratize a party. First, we need to assess the state of the party and maybe be more anthropological. Since many practices are informal and do not necessarily follow party procedures, we should try to understand party behaviour first. Secondly, intra-party democracy requires members, which many parties do not really have. They have followers or supporters instead. More attentions should therefore be devoted to the identification of these members. Thirdly, as long as parties are financed by individuals it will be hard for them to be accountable to not-contributing followers. The issue of party finance should therefore be a key element of any intra-party democracy discussion.

There seemed to be agreement during the first session that we should not exclude parties that do not live up to our standards of intra-party democracy from our programmes, but that we should try to provide (self-)assessment tools to parties which can be used to further the discussion on the state and prospects of parties' internal functioning. An open and pro-reform attitude of party leaders is, however, essential, Sari Varpama (Demo Finland) argued.

4. Session 2: Exchange of democratization experiences

The second session moved from the more analytic discussion on the main challenges to some practical experiences. NDI, IDEA and NIMD representatives elaborated on their experiences from three different angles. Sef Ashiagbor (NDI) opened the discussion by elaborating 6 elements that characterize the NDI approach and are essential in intra-party democratization. Firstly, parties should be confronted with the benefits of intra-party democracy: increased capacity to attract people and especially better candidates, as well as increased fundraising possibilities. It basically is a marketing issue, she argued, intra-party

democracy has to be packaged in the right way. Secondly, trust should be build at the leadership level, so that party leaders have the feeling they can be open and honest. This involves long-term relations. Thirdly, NDI focuses more on practices than on structures and takes up a soft approach. This involves discussion on how things are currently going in the party, rather than focusing o candidate selection procedures. Also, proposing to experiment with certain innovative instruments for a short-term only might be more likely to get adopted than proposing structural measures. Fourthly, timeliness is important: in-between election time is the best time to get reform started. Fifthly, different entry points should be used when working with a party: youth, women, party leaders, branch level, etc. It is important to keep party leaders informed at all times and to develop skills that are actually beneficial to parties. Finally, parties should be helped in identifying appropriate safeguards in finding a balance between leadership control on the one hand and grass-root participation on the other hand. To conclude, it needs to be stressed that it is important to define intra-party democracy, which is something NDI currently works on by developing norms and standards for political parties. Also we should remain realistic and realize that changes will be small and incremental.

James Gomez (IDEA) took a different approach and elaborated on the shift IDEA is making from research and development to on-the-ground capacity building, in cooperation with other agencies. An operational challenge that IDEA has recently identified, involves the coordination between headquarters and field offices. It is currently involved in setting up a field office in Nepal, and will later move on to other parts of the world, such as Bolivia and the Arab world. IDEA's strategy is one of knowledge provision, advice and dialogue on reform.

Thirdly, Renier Nijskens (NIMD) returns to the state and development of political parties, before addressing the role of NIMD in intra-party democratization efforts. Some examples of well-performing inclusive parties in several African countries could be helpful as marketing tool, Mr. Nijskens advocates. Dominant parties exist in Tanzania (CCM), South Africa (ANC) and Mozambique (Frelimo). These three successful parties share some characteristics: (1) high institutionalization and activity level, (2) dominance of loyalty to party ideas, (3) clearly indicated party principles, (4) strong internal communication, (5) diversified representation (e.g. women), (6) clearly defined procedures to select party leader, (7) decentralized organization. These characteristics seem to be important in their success, but are also connected to less-democratic characteristics. These parties lack for instance a high degree of transparency in finances and party leaders may have possibilities to abuse the party's ideology. Regarding NIMD's experiences in Africa on this theme, it was concluded that NIMD is still not that far on its way and that progress still needs to be made. The issue is, however, on top of the agenda of the East and South Africa Regional Programme (ESARP) for 2007. To some extents party conventions have been supported by NIMD if this was critical to a party's development. Furthermore, the issue of inclusiveness has been given wide attention throughout NIMD country programmes.

The examples of successful parties that Mr. Nijskens elaborated might show some of the conditions needed for parties to successfully implement intra-party democracy, Dr. Magolowondo argues. This could entail issues as a party's ideological identity, organizational structure, clearly defined procedures, and a long history. The issue of incentives for political party leaders remains a critical one during the discussion. It remains very difficult to show any direct link between intra-party democracy and electoral success, since there are too many factors influencing the results. Parties could use their democratic image in electoral campaigns, but this is no guarantee for success. In Latin America there seems to be a

relation between ideology and intra-party democracy. The left seems to be more democratic than the right. Contradictory examples can, however, be presented as well. It seems reasonable that some relation exists between a party's identity and their vision on democratic practice, although it might not be possible to show a direct link. Again too many other factors are relevant here.

5. Break-away session 1: Leadership and stability

In three break-away sessions, sub themes have been elaborately discussed. The first session addressed the theme of leadership selection and stability. It delved into the issue of how to best select a new leader by not endangering the stability of the party. By focusing on the cases of Nepal and Georgia, it was concluded that leadership selection could be organized in an open way. In Nepal the lack of intra-party democracy could even have led to larger fragmentation and instability, argued Dr. Katak Malla (University of Stockholm). The opening up of party leadership selection would, however, not necessarily improve the inclusion of all members, neither would it guarantee that primaries are not being used as mere promotional tool or window dressing. Moreover, for parties to successfully organize a democratic election of a new party leader, the elite should proclaim openly that new leaders are welcome. Finally, opening up could increase the role of money in pre-selection procedures, which would require even more need to legally guarantee transparency and accountability. It will, however, be difficult and not preferable to enforce open primaries on parties. The role of international organizations should be one of advise, support and dialogue.

6. Break-away session 2: Candidate selection and inclusivity

The second break-away session delved into the issue of candidate selection and inclusivity, focusing on the case of Indonesia and South-Africa. While Indonesia shows a lack of grass-root participation and consultation, the ANC in South-Africa shows a 30 percent quota for women. Although this quota ensures participation of women and shows an interest in inclusivity, strong leadership involvement in drawing up candidate lists remains and no binding commitment has been made to any other possibly underrepresented group. In general, it has been argued that quota measures of ensuring candidate lists have advantages as well as disadvantages. Concerns involve unity, flexibility and stability within the party, while the main benefit involves a better representation of underrepresented groups. Furthermore, the consequences in engaging in formal and informal fuzzy rules have been discussed. Informal rules tend to be efficient and great for the leadership, while patronage and illegitimacy may thrive. Formal rules, on the other hand, provides clarity, legitimacy and maybe better chances for underrepresented groups, but are less flexible. A balance needs to be found between flexibility and legitimacy, and representation and stability. Furthermore, it has been argued that to be eligible for selection in ANC you have to be a member of good standing, with expertise and experience, and should not have any history of bad conduct. There is an increasing debate on internal democracy of ANC. Those who criticize the party functioning are, however, seen as criticizing ANC's ideology, which makes open discussion difficult. Since there is no real opposition, ANC does not have any incentive to change.

Similarly, parties in Indonesia do not have much incentive to change. No serious legal requirements or incentives are in place, except for some legal 'suggestions'. The only legal requirement is that the candidates for the National Assembly have to be selected by the Central Board of the party. Furthermore, no significant rules seem to exist within political parties. Since party funding is a serious problem, those who can provide funding for

campaigns have a good chance to be selected. Only one occasion of democratic candidate selection has been organized. Other parties do have, however, mechanisms of consultation or consensus. Parties do have, however, the opportunity to recall individual Members of Parliament (MPs). Although this measure supports power concentration at the party leadership, it also disables floor crossing and increases party unity. Conclusions on the Indonesian case include the need for local consultation in drawing up candidate lists and the adverse effects of self-funded campaigns.

The differences between South Africa and Indonesia are profound. The latter seems to have less inclusive parties, because of a historical tradition as well as a lacking legal framework. It has been argued that the incentives for change have to be created by focusing on what is in it for the parties. Furthermore, the basic conditions for change need to be there, e.g. membership (registration) and organizational capacity. In general, it is concluded that the following elements need to be included in discussion on inclusivity and candidate selection: party financing, legislation, membership activation, creating demand for intra-party democracy, formalization of mechanisms, the impact of the electoral system, and the balancing of interests. Next step that needs to be taken involves the identification of lessons learned by presenting more case studies.

7. Break-away session 3: participation and party programmes

Finally, widening the concept of intra-party democracy, a third break-away session discussed the consultation of grass roots in the design of party programmes. Dr. Leticia Ruiz (Universidad de Salamanca) presented the Latin American and especially Chilean example. It showed that a large diversity exists in how parties construct their political programme. While one party included 400 experts and organized 38 workshops, another party just appointed 5 experts who drew up the party programme. None of the parties, however, included their grass-root members extensively, neither did the parties attribute high value to the programmes, although some parties regard it as more important than others. It may be very risky as well if (future) MPs are not included in the construction of party programmes. Without their inclusion in and approval of the process and the end result, party programmes may not be carried by future party representatives. Again, it is important to see what incentives political parties have in using party programmes. Benefits of party programmes include:

- enhancement of accountability towards voters after elections;
- strengthening of internal unity;
- strengthening of governability of parties;
- less internal conflicts;
- enhancement of bargaining position of parties.

On the other hand, some downsides can be formulated:

- less flexibility;
- accountability is not always desired by leaders;
- voters do not always care that much about party programmes;
- programmes are costly;
- programmes may tend to create conflicts.

Taking these downsides into account, party programmes can still be a large advantage in strengthening political parties, although the road to implementation is sometimes long.

8. Conclusions and follow up

The day was concluded by summarizing the main conclusions of the day. It was stated that all participants of the expert meeting have shown to be very capable of identifying the main challenges, but that providing (general) strategies and solutions is much more complex and difficult. Main conclusions include the following:

- Challenges in intra-party democracy include the lacking institutionalization of parties, the dominance of elites, the lack of inclusion of women and youth, the adverse effects of patronage, the lack of accountability of leadership, a lack of participation of grass roots, and the non-competitiveness of the selection of leaders and candidates. These problems are widely related to the state and development of democracy at large and are therefore necessary to address in any democratization strategy.
- Internal party democratization is not a goal as such but should have positive effects on the state and development of democracy in society.
- Intra-party democracy may also entail some risks. Overly or too rapidly opening up of candidate selection procedures may create instability and might not strengthen the party's electioneering capacity. Therefore, intra-party democracy should always be seen in the light of party leaders' interests. Without their consent and support, nothing can really change. A balance should be found between opening up procedures and ensuring party stability.
- Intra-party democracy can be promoted by focusing on possible positive effects, such as an improved image, better candidates, better party unity, etc. The presentation of well-performing inclusive parties can be helpful in promoting intra-party democracy. Also, more knowledge is necessary on the linkages between electoral success and particular instruments of democratization.
- It is essential to take the local context and the state of development of the political party into account while designing internal democratization strategies and instruments. A (self-)assessment tool is therefore a very necessary and useful instrument to develop and refine in a joint effort. Moreover, the cultural and legal environment partly determines the success of democratization strategies.
- Some instruments of intra-party democratization depend on particular conditions, such as a strong organization, the existence of members in stead of followers, membership registration, ideological underpinnings, regulated or public provision of party financing, etc. The identification of these conditions is a necessary step before advancing in any internal democratization strategy.
- We should not advance too rapidly in intra-party democratization efforts. Instead we should take an incremental approach by promoting dialogue, knowledge and innovative experiments.

To enhance working methods further and to continue exchanging experiences with other institutes, it has been proposed to create an international network on the theme of intra-party democratization. This proposal was very welcomed by participating practitioners and academics from participating institutes and will be an important future instrument in supporting political parties in their democratization efforts. This could entail the sharing of practical tools and training modules, the presentation of best practices and lessons learned, the organization of thematic events, or a joint stock-taking effort by means of a global survey. Now the first step of getting to know each other and identifying the main challenges

has been taken, we can proceed by creating this dynamic and practical network. NIMD can play a facilitating role in keeping the network alive and useful.

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