

Introduction at International Conference

on

India and the World-wide Movement for Democracy: What India Can Learn from other's Experiences and What it has to Give

by

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Introduction

The euphoria about the spread of democracy following dramatic political events of the mid-eighties and early nineties -- the overthrow of authoritarian military regimes in countries of Latin America, the dismantling of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the fall of the communist system and the Berlin Wall -- is over. Democracy has proven more difficult to achieve than many assumed. The initial steps towards democracy with the organization of competitive elections, as undertaken in many countries, proved not to be enough to deliver on the high expectations among people for an improvement in their lives. Yet, eight out of ten citizens said in a worldwide Gallup poll in 2005 that despite its problems, democracy is the best system of government.

Democracy does not come by itself and it cannot be imported from abroad, let alone be implanted by military means. It has to grow from within countries by gradually institutionalizing and constructing political processes that express the universal values that are intrinsic to democracy. Mahatma Gandhi already observed over 60 years ago that **'the spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without. It must come from within'**. It is still the golden rule that should guide genuine democracy support efforts.

Values such as respect for diversity and pluralism, tolerance, justice, freedom, human rights, and non-violence are universal core values that are embedded in the rich cultural diversity around the globe. As the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated on October 30th, 2006: *"...democracy is a universal right that does not belong to any country or region, and that participatory governance, based on the will of the people, is the best path to freedom, growth and development."*

Transforming these values into the practice of democratic governance takes time, which is in short supply because of people's high expectations for democratic government to deliver. Yet, to quote Kofi Annan once more: *"No nation is born a democracy."* It requires effort and time to build while it requires permanent maintenance as well. To manage the process of democracy building and the expectations of people, governments need to ensure a 'social contract' with their people that provides those governments the legitimacy to govern.

The advancement of democracy is not only an essential goal in its own right, but it is also linked 1) to peace building, by practicing the resolution of conflicts non-violently, 2) to the consolidation of all human rights, through the application of the rule of law and social justice, and 3) to economic growth and development, through government that invests in human capital because it is accountable to its people.

Recent studies (including studies by the US Council of Foreign Affairs, by Daniel Kaufman of the WBI and the book 'The Democratic Advantage' by Morton Halperin and others) show that democracies and democratizing countries outperform their authoritarian counterparts on the full range of development indicators. Based on statistical analysis over the past 40 years, there is no evidence of an authoritarian advantage when it comes to economic growth. Democracies have a 30% positive edge.

In addition, poor democracies have been much better at avoiding economic disasters. Twice as often, poor autocracies have experienced drops of ten percent or more in annual national income. Of all the countries below the poverty line, it are democracies that are most likely to achieve the MDG targets for 2015. Their citizens live a decade longer. Fifty percent fewer of

their children die before their fifth birthday. Twice as many children attend secondary school. And agricultural productivity is a third higher in poor democracies than in poor autocracies.

One of the main lessons learned during the past two decades about the possibilities of supporting democracy is that laying the foundations for democracy and good governance through institution-building support to electoral administrations, legislatures, judiciaries, media, civil service, or capacity building efforts directed at governance actors, are not sufficient to generate democracy. Instrumental or procedural approaches to democracy – also referred to as the functional approaches - do not guarantee that democracy delivers on the expectations of the governed. Unless there is broad-based commitment to democracy within a society, which can only be achieved through dialogue and consensus-building about the institutional arrangements and procedures, democracy will not take root.

During the ‘first wave’ of democracy in the 19th century in the Western countries, democracy evolved as the outcome of a long process of struggle in what are now called established democracies. As a result, the democratic architecture in each of these countries is different, none inherently better than the other. I come from the European Union which encompasses today 27 different countries, each with a different political system, all democratic. The differences are the result of historical, geographic and demographic factors. None of the systems can credibly claim that it is better than the others.

The countries that opted for a democratic system of governance in the ‘third wave’ of democracy towards the end of the Cold War period, have had to establish democracy in a limited time period. Democracy is no longer the outcome of a process but the explicit objective of reform processes. Democracy became the imperative form of governance during the past decade. The unfortunate result is that too often local accountability for the democratic reform process is geared towards the international donor community instead of the national constituency.

The lessons learned in the evolution of India’s democracy, the biggest democracy in the world, underlines the importance of what is referred to as the *indigenization* of democracy. It shows that local ownership is a necessary condition for reaching consensus about the idea of democracy among the people and the elite. The Indian historical process has followed no one’s script. It has, therefore, not produced neat outcomes. It leaves gaps, and produces contradictions. There is, in other words, no shortcut to developing and sustaining the principles of democracy except weaving every strand and tying every thread to assure that it is part of the belief and value system of the people.

Many of the countries that have recently engaged in democratic reform processes are still operating within frameworks inherited from their erstwhile colonial rulers. These frameworks were often used to consolidate the power-base of the new elites that gained independence without the adaptation through which India’s democracy has become entrenched, for example.

The majority of countries that introduced democracy during the 90s and at the beginning of this century have, remained ‘illiberal’ democracies or democracies in form only. A new, ‘fourth’ wave of democratization is required for democracy to gain substantive meaning. It must focus on reconciling past causes of conflict and on new constitutional processes -- with constitutions being viewed as the autobiographies of nations (South African Constitutional Court Judge Albie Sachs) -- and should combine the practice of inclusivity and accommodation with regular competition for elected office. It should focus on the entrenchment of democracy and in ensuring that democracy and social justice go hand in hand, remembering another famous observation of Ghandi that **‘poverty is the worst form of violence’**.

As democracy has to be generated from within societies, outcomes will differ. It is then a paradox in a globalizing world that the definition of what constitutes a democracy appears to be shrinking. A check-list model of democracy has quickly taken over the global imagination, like a fashionable trend in the project and programme management culture of agencies in international cooperation. It leaves little room for plural conceptions or appreciation of different institutional and procedural models of democracy.

The technical approaches, often wrapped in speak about ‘governance’, tend to depoliticize what is inherently a political process while disempowering the key stakeholders in the process, the political parties that ought to be the principled agencies for aggravating the political choices in the public decision making arena within pluriform democracies. If local politicians are not accountable to their electorates for the international assistance their countries receive – often being accountable to the international donors instead – how can democracy start to take root in their societies? Increasingly questions are raised about in how much the delivery of international development cooperation is furthering the consolidation of democracy or the opposite? For those supporting democracy the walls between development cooperation and democracy support need to be torn down.

The value of *process*, the *time* that is required for *change* without the system breaking down into violent conflict, the importance of *indigenization* (local ownership) of the idea and resulting institutions and procedures of governance, the need for more comprehensive and authentic analysis of how political systems can be improved, all have implications for *how* democracy can and cannot be supported from the outside.

The NIMD approach to democracy support

How are these lessons applied in the programmes supported by the organization I do represent at this occasion, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)? NIMD is a relatively new organization in the democracy support business, formally established in 2000 and operational since 2002. It is an organization formed by the 7 major political parties in the Dutch parliament, both parties that are in government and those in opposition, it includes the 3 big parties in parliament and 4 smaller ones. The mandate of the organization is to support in young democracies the consolidation of multiparty political systems, the institutional development of political parties and the improvement of the relations between political parties on the one hand and civil society, the private sector and media on the other hand.

NIMD recognizes that young democracies generally are fragile states in which not only democracy is not well established but also the process of nation and state building are in full process. Recognizing this fragility, facilitating local ownership and development of political reform agendas that aim at improving the performance of democracy through inclusive dialogue processes by stakeholders representing the full political spectrum, is the main methodology of the NIMD approach. Rather than fragmenting support to parties along political ideological lines in often very charged political environments, NIMD aims to contribute to the improvement of the political party system as a whole. Key words are local ownership, dialogue, facilitating national analysis and development of national political reform agendas, inclusivity, peer reviews, sustained cooperation through long-term partnerships with all stakeholders in the political process. Every year, two NIMD programmes are externally evaluated and every fourth year the full NIMD operation. The results are publicly available in an effort to be fully accountable ourselves and to

share experiences in what still is the young professional business of providing democracy assistance.

Let me quote from the most recent external evaluation, implemented for the Zambia programme by a team of academics: *“The NIMD funded programmes are a living experiment. Ambitious, unique, daring, risky, but utterly relevant and at the heart of what development really is all about: politics!”* The setting in which the NIMD programme operate is aptly and candidly described in this evaluation as *“a turbulent political environment where (the partners) have to walk a fine line between the political world where predatory politics prevail and another universe where rules and regulations try to counterbalance arbitrary power abuses.”*

Much of international democracy assistance has focused on support for state institutions and civil society organizations. The intermediary political institutions between the state and civil society and the private sector, such as political parties, have long been neglected within international cooperation. However, weak political party systems and weak non-institutionalized political parties are increasingly considered an important impediment for stable democratic political systems. Because political parties were considered to be too political and generally not very popular – to use an understatement - with the general public in many countries, they were the missing link in the provision of democracy assistance. In academic writings, such as Randall’s, the contribution of political parties to democratic development is questioned since they are seen as part of the problem, yet academic observers often conclude that political parties are indispensable for democracy and have to make a real contribution to make to the legitimacy of government and of the system of government. Yes, political parties are part of the problem but part of the solution as well. Neglecting and bypassing them does nothing to advance democracy.

The instability in young democracies was recently described by former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa to be caused by the mistrust amongst political parties and amongst political parties and their people. That lack of trust is aggravated by political systems that nourish what has been referred as the ‘winner takes all syndrome’ in which significant sections of the population are excluded from representation in the political decision-making processes and which generally does not provide incentives to enhance the legitimacy (defined as wide support among the population) of government policies.

The fact that Dutch parties work together for the mentioned objective has proven to be an inspiration for political parties entrenched in conflicts and confrontation in the young democracies with whom NIMD has established partnership relations. For many countries, the fact that political parties can work together to advance their democracies is a new concept and has resulted in the emergence of institutionalized forms of dialogue within Centers for Multiparty Democracy (CMD’s). These CMD’s are novel institutions within the democratic architecture within these countries and are operational in one way or another today in countries such as Kenya, Ghana, Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi, Mali, Bolivia, Guatemala and Indonesia, while the South Africa President Thabo Mbeki called in his last State of the Union for the establishment of a CMD in South Africa.

The NIMD is facilitating these institutionalized platforms for inter-party dialogue, today in 17 countries working with over 150 political parties. The dialogues in these countries have resulted in a number of national agenda’s to consolidate peace and democracy, outlining joint priorities for reform processes, in initiatives for constitutional reform processes, for reforms in electoral systems, in reforms of legislation of political party laws, in legislation of public funding of political parties to combat the endemic corruption in the political arena, in codes of conduct to

regulate political party behavior during election time, in initiatives to enhance the participation of women, youth and indigenous people in the political process.

The institutionalization means that the dialogue is not only aimed at reaching agreement about needed reform processes but that the focus is also on assuring the implementation of these reforms. In the process, new links are established between the political parties and their representatives in parliament to ensure follow through on the legislative agendas whereas at the same time, new bridges are built with civil society organization and media to obtain wide support for reforms pursued. The CMS's are also starting to play a role in influencing the donor agendas in relation to international support provided for democracy or governance and will in future hopefully become instrumental in harmonizing international assistance (implementation of the Paris Agenda) for democratic reforms within their countries.

In addition to focusing on the inter-party dialogues aimed at improving the working of the multiparty political system, the CMD's have also engaged the political parties in agreements about joint modalities for support to the institutional development of individual political parties. These modalities are fully transparent and accountability exists for the support provided to individual political parties. NIMD is probably the only organization that provides direct financial assistance to individual political parties through these jointly agreed modalities and based on strategic programmes that parties have developed for their institutional development. Activities supported within this context focus on the strengthening of internal party democracy, the development of party platforms or party programmes (clarifying which position they taken within the political spectrum within their countries), improving basic organizational and financial administration skills, out-reach activities to connect local party constituencies with national leadership, etc.

I underline, that all political parties elected to parliament together with a representation from the officially registered political parties are participating in the CMD's and form their governing Boards. In its leadership, CMD's are expected to be representative for both government and opposition parties and should be inclusive in the exercise of their mandates.

This does not mean that NIMD continues to support parties that do not abide by the agreed modalities, parties that choose not to be accountable or engage in corrupt practices. However, we have noted that the peer pressure that is applied through the joint modalities within the CMD's has been rather effective to encourage parties from moving away from habits that question their credibility. Parties deselecting themselves from the cooperation by not living up to the commitments they have entered into, are likely to expose themselves to negative media coverage.

Next to our focus on support programmes at the country level, NIMD has also facilitated networks of political parties in the regions in which our partner countries are situated. Again, these networks are novel in the sense that for the first time parties across the political spectrum have started to cooperate at regional levels opening the possibility of peer to peer reviews of reform process within the political systems and within individual political parties. Regional networks function in East and Southern Africa and in West Africa, while networks are emerging in the Andean region in Latin America and in Central America. These exchanges are proving very effective in stimulating party leadership to follow good examples and to increase the political will to implement reforms.

I have just returned from a week long visit to Guatemala, a country that emerged only 10 years ago from a 35 year long civil war that killed over 200.000 of its inhabitants. It was positive to note how through the cooperation between the political parties the culture of confrontation in

that country has changed into a culture of cooperation and of consensus seeking. Ten years ago, parties and civil society organizations were not talking to each other, that has changed radically today.

A politician from an opposition party in Ghana recently stated that through the cooperation between the political parties we have learned to disagree without becoming disagreeable. Political parties now engage each other in policy debates on radio and television but also in districts throughout the country. The experience that there is much to be gained in looking for agreements that carry wide support, improving the legitimacy of governance, is an important ingredient of the illusive 'political will' that is needed to pursue often difficult and risky reform processes.

In Indonesia, the 7 big political parties decided earlier this year to establish what they call a Community of Dialogue that is moderated by the NIMD partner in Indonesia. This regular dialogue is focusing on resolving the political differences about such issues as the introduction of independent candidates in elections, the threshold for elections, the boundary lines for electoral districts, how to calculate the rest vote and other important aspects of the electoral system in time for the next presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 2009.

The European agenda

As part of the European Union, NIMD has developed a European agenda that recognizes democracy as Europe's core vocation on which our own unparalleled prosperity and peace within Europe is based. We argue that the external policies of the European Union should be based on the same vocation and that the EU should become a more pro-active and visible player in the advancement of democracy world-wide.

For this reason we have engaged in a European debate about what Europe's added value can be in supporting democracy outside the European borders, i.e. what is Europe's specific identity in this field. A number of notions have emerged in this regards that indicate that Europe's specific experience in practicing unity in diversity, in recognizing that democracy takes different institutional and procedural forms and shapes, that democracy and social justice go hand in hand, that it is work in progress and that successful reform processes are pursued through peaceful dialogue processes. In many parts of the world, partners engaged in advancing democracy observe and sometimes complain that Europe is often missing from the debates and that no gateway exists for engaging the key stakeholders within the EU.

Time has come to fill this void. For that reason a network of democracy organizations and activists in Europe have taken the initiative to establish the European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership (EFDP) that will open offices in Brussels at the beginning of the new year, 2008. This new European network of democracy support agencies will first engage in roundtable dialogues with counterparts at the various continents to define common agendas on how best the European Union could improve its democracy assistance and what role the EFDP can play in this regard.

Conclusion

Whereas we are in the process of strengthening the European capacity to provide professional democracy assistance, I would welcome our Indian friends and counterparts to do the same. The impact of our efforts, within an international context that has become more complex for the advancement of democracy, will be improved if we can establish close ties with expertise in democracy support from around the globe.

In our programmes, I often draw on my limited knowledge about the profound Indian experience with the consolidation of your democracy. People often like to refer to the Chinese economic model as a possible alternative for democracy, but I always draw their attention to the Indian model of democracy with impressive economic development. My assessment is that the Indian model will prove to be more sustainable in the longer run than the Chinese model. And although India plays a prominent role in democracy promoting networks internationally, such as the Community of Democracies, the UN Democracy Fund and in International IDEA, I am not aware of the existence of specific democracy support agencies with a mandate to share professional experience outside India.

With reference to the introduction of this paper in which the instructive path of India's democratic development was briefly mentioned, your experience would be most welcome in the debates of political stakeholders in young democracies about how the performance of their democracies can be improved and how the practice of democracy can take root in the relations between the political elites and the people they are supposed to represent. India has a lot to 'give' as the title of the conference suggests. I hope indeed that this conference will provide encouragement and inspiration to take up this challenge. Be assured that in this endeavor NIMD will be most pleased to share whatever experience that may be of relevance to you.

To ensure peaceful conditions, to meet the challenges posed by global warming and climate change, by international crime and extremism, by the spread of small arms and uncontrolled nuclear proliferation, we are all stakeholders in making democracy work and extending it to those struggling for democracy under dictatorships. As an American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr once aptly summarized:

Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

Thank you for your attention!