



Elise* is a young woman who owns a business in her small village in the Burundian hills, operating a bar and restaurant. She enjoys her independence, and uses her entrepreneurial spirit to help other women and girls to meet their basic needs and reach economic autonomy. Elise has always been interested in politics, and joined one of the major Burundian opposition parties - an innovative party known for putting women in good positions in the list of the 2015 communal elections - when she was young.

At a workshop for women and youth members of her party organized by the Burundi Leadership Training Programme (BLTP), NIMD's partner in Burundi, Elise steps forward and speaks out:

"We cannot leave this place without thanking BLTP for the trainings it organizes for political parties. The training I took reinforced my personal leadership. Even more important, since I have participated in the trainings by BLTP, my fear has disappeared."

OUR WORK IN BURUNDI

THE CONFIDENCE TO SPEAK OUT: HELPING A YOUNG WOMAN LEADER BUILD HER LEADERSHIP SKILLS

The workshop during which Elise chose to speak out was one of many organized in Burundi by NIMD and its partner BLTP. Together, through these workshops, the two organizations work to create the conditions for dialogue between the different political parties. In accordance with the Ministry of the Interior, the workshops are organized in an inclusive way, involving all major parties across the political spectrum, both in government and in opposition. They empower politicians and civil leaders on a local and regional level with the skills needed to lead their parties forward and to enter into conversation with one another.

In addition, NIMD and BLTP invest in the long-term organizational development of political parties, helping them face the challenges ahead and carry out their role in a multiparty democracy. This work is fundamental in helping parties to navigate their country's political and historical context.

* Names have been changed for privacy reasons



▲ The Burundian context

Burundi is a small but densely populated land-locked country in the heart of Africa. It consistently ranks among the least-developed countries in the world, coming in at 184 out of 188 on the 2015 Human Development Index. The country has witnessed decades of violent civil conflict between ethnic groups since its independence in 1962. When the last major belligerent parties signed up to the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi with ceasefire agreements in 2003 and 2006, it ended the most recent episode of large-scale violence, the 1993-2005 civil war. Under the supervision of a number of subsequent UN missions, hopes ran high for Burundi's peaceful transition to a multiparty democracy. In 2005, the current President Pierre Nkurunziza was democratically elected to become the first post-transitional president.

However, around the elections of 2010, relations between political parties hardened and many of the main opposition parties boycotted the elections out of concerns that they would be unfair. A contested decision by President Nkurunziza to run for a third term, judged by some to be unconstitutional, sparked a major political crisis in 2015. Violent protests, an attempted coup d'état, and a refugee crisis followed. Moreover, the political landscape became polarized and parties weakened. Strong political distrust and a lack of inclusive dialogue between different groups still pose a significant challenge.

In a context of polarization, and with parties poorly equipped to stand up to the country's challenges, the promise of constructive dialogue between parties that can help one of the world's poorest countries forward threatened to wither away.

It was in this political climate that Elise realized that politics in Burundi affects everything and everyone. She noticed how, as a result of her affiliation to her party, more and more people started to avoid her shop, even those who were regular customers only a few years ago. She said: "I love politics because I believe in the ideology of justice and the solidarity of my party. But the polarization has detrimental effects for my business. Sometimes my clients will not eat here anymore, or are afraid to visit my bar out of fear of being associated with my party." This made Elise realize she wanted to get more involved. So, she was happy when the opportunity came up to become a provincial leader of her party.

▲ Strengthening capacities and fostering dialogue

In her new capacity as provincial party leader, Elise found herself speaking of how the trainings had helped her to

lead her party and overcome the fear to speak out. Elise was proud to state that this training had strengthened her personal leadership skills. She also explained the importance of these meetings for her party as a whole. By the time that she became provincial leader, it was very difficult for opposition parties to organize meetings and operate normally. Because of the high level of mistrust between the ruling party and opposition parties, some leaders from the opposition have been obliged to flee the country or avoid public areas. Others have been jailed.

The training that NIMD and BLTP organize for all major Burundian parties helps them to face these challenges, as well as strengthening the democratic and leadership skills of their members. Elise commented on the importance of the physical contact for the party: "I did not know there could be an opportunity to see members of my party physically assembled. Even we provincial leaders did not know each other and we communicated by phone, and now the training of the BLTP gives us this opportunity."



The training that the parties enjoy individually also helps them to meet each other in dialogue. A well-prepared party that has its internal processes in order is, after all, more capable of entering into political discussions and dialogue with other parties. This sort of preparation increases confidence in one's own positions, and fosters an openness to recognizing the importance of working together to help solve the challenges facing Burundi's population. Elise's training helped her to have the confidence to attend dialogue meetings with other parties, including the ruling party, and to enthuse and convince members of her own party to join her. Given the difficult circumstances that surround politics in Burundi, this is not always an easy journey.

In bringing together different parties, the workshops are always inclusive and impartial. Above all, they take place in an atmosphere of trust and confidence, in which party members can speak freely together. As Elise commented, with a sense of relief and hope: "Meeting with members of other parties is very beneficial for us. This dissipates our fear when we see that we can speak, express our opinion and live together with participants from other parties." After all, dialogue develops with physical contact. At these meetings, parties discuss the most important challenges for Burundi, and how to move forward from the current political impasse.

NIMD continues to support political parties in Burundi – based on its values of impartiality, inclusiveness and long-term commitment – to engage in constructive dialogue and find a way out of the current crisis. At the same time, it capacitates both young and more seasoned politicians like Elise to help them to improve their leadership skills, and their understanding and application of democratic values, as well as more technical capacities like negotiation and non-violent political communication. We are confident that the combination of well-organized parties, trained political

leaders like Elise, and a continuous effort to create an enabling environment for dialogue will contribute to a peaceful solution for Burundi's many challenges.





In Colombia, there is not a single person alive who has known long-lasting peace. NIMD Country Director Angela Rodriguez, like so many Colombians of her generation, grew up in fear of bombs, kidnappings and civil war. A daughter of ophthalmologists, she and her younger brother grew up in a caring and hardworking family. She developed an interest for politics from an early age, and therefore it was a logical choice for her to study political science and policy and development.

Since the mid-sixties, the main conflict in Colombia has been between the Government and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). Over the years, this conflict has caused the death of an estimated 250,000 people and left 7 million internally displaced. One of its root causes was the political exclusion of large parts of society, which contributed to the emergence of illegal armed groups such as the FARC. With a deep desire to promote reconciliation and fight polarization in her country, Angela decided to dedicate herself to working towards a better political system.

OUR WORK IN COLOMBIA

NIMD AND THE COLOMBIAN PEACE AGREEMENT: TOWARDS A MORE EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

When NIMD started working in Colombia in 2010, it was in an effort to strengthen political parties and make the political system more open and inclusive. At that time, Angela was working at UNDP, through which NIMD initially implemented its programmes. When NIMD decided to found its own country office in Colombia, Angela decided to join and help set up the office. Through years of working closely with most of the country's political parties and building up good personal relations, NIMD has managed to gain their trust. NIMD's impartiality, local ownership and long-term commitment are also crucial to its ability to work with parties that represent very different political ideologies.

Through its regular work with political parties and government institutions, NIMD already had a good relationship with the Colombian government when the peace process began. But, foreseeing the support that would be needed on both sides of the table after a peace agreement was reached, the organization took a bold step and reached out to the FARC during the earlier stages of the negotiations to offer its help. When it became apparent in 2016 that peace negotiations between the Colombian Government and the FARC were coming to a satisfactory conclusion, the negotiation table in Havana invited Angela, as NIMD Colombia's Executive Director, for preliminary talks with both parties to discuss the objectives of the Special Electoral Mission that NIMD was invited to compose.

▲ Changing perspectives: Meeting the FARC

Growing up in Colombia's capital, Bogotá, all Angela ever heard was that the FARC was the enemy and the cause of all the violence, kidnappings and disappearances. Therefore, on a personal level, she found it hard to meet with them at first. But there was no turning back.

When she entered the meeting room in complete silence, she immediately recognized two of the main commanders of the FARC. As the conversation turned to the political roots of the conflict, Angela struggled to stay focused. She couldn't believe where she was. Yet, the FARC commanders were friendly, and there was laughter during the meeting. They said goodbye with a hug.

However, something was not right for Angela and she left the place feeling uncomfortable without knowing exactly why. She started to go back through every comment and gesture in her mind, trying to identify something inappropriate, but she was sure the commanders had shown her nothing but respect. The next day she shared the experience with her father, who had first triggered her interest in politics, and taught her how to interpret the newspapers filled with stories about assassinations of presidential candidates and bombings. For him the answer was easy: Angela had started to humanize the monster she grew up hating and fearing: the start of reconciliation after conflict.

For Angela, the unexpectedly fruitful meetings reiterated the importance of always keeping an open mind and being willing to dialogue with your perceived adversaries. The talks had focused on the necessity of inclusion and the need for all people to be able to participate in politics. The creation of a political party representing both

the views and the constituency of the FARC would therefore be crucial for stable and lasting peace in Colombia. With this in mind, Angela offered NIMD's institutional support and expertise to the FARC to help it transition to a legal political party.



▲ Towards stable and durable peace

Not long after, in September 2016, both parties signed the (initial) historic Peace Agreement in Cartagena, ending over 60 years of internal conflict. It was a development welcomed by both sides, and hailed a victory by Iván Márquez, the FARC's top negotiator: "We have won the most beautiful of all battles: [the battle] of peace for Colombia. The battle with weapons ends and the battle of ideas begins."

Colombia's President, Juan Manuel Santos also underlined the importance of the FARC's transition: "Today, as you begin your return to society, as you begin your conversion into an unarmed political movement [...], I welcome you to democracy".

However, this process was about to take an unexpected and disconcerting turn. The Peace Agreement was to be approved by the Colombian people in a plebiscite on 2 October 2016, but against all expectations, the "NO" side won the referendum. The shock result seemed to paralyze the country. People were crying in the streets of Bogotá, and across the country. Angela was one of those people; in total disbelief she felt she was seeing her dream of peace in Colombia collapse before her eyes. Yet, the following weeks were astounding, with thousands and thousands of mostly young people taking to the streets in Bogotá and other major cities, protesting peacefully and demanding peace. The negotiating parties tried to incorporate as many objections of the NO camp as they could, and a revised peace agreement was approved by Congress in December. The work towards stable and durable peace could finally start.

▲ NIMD's role

Angela's involvement throughout the negotiating process resulted in NIMD being the only Dutch NGO to have two official roles in the Peace Agreement under Point 2 (political participation) and Point 6 (implementation and verification). For Angela, the chance to contribute to the reform of the political system, and thereby help to make politics accessible for so many of her compatriots, is literally writing history. She was so honoured to be able to contribute to peace in her country and the establishment of a more united Colombia that she could not wait to start.



NIMD quickly got to work as a member of the selection committee for the Special Electoral Mission, a committee responsible for providing recommendations to improve the electoral system.

This group strived to make the political system more inclusive, opening up democratic space for new actors and thereby mitigating the chances of a relapse into armed conflict. Angela led the technical secretariat of this Special Electoral Mission. In this capacity, she was the main spokesperson of the Mission, chairing most meetings and using her contacts with all existing political parties to make sure that their diverging views were taken into consideration.

Secondly, NIMD officially provides its institutional support for the implementation of the Agreement on Political Participation, together with Carter Centre, UNASUR and Switzerland, and aims to communicate the significance of the reforms more broadly to the public.

Besides its official duties, NIMD wants to make sure that all parties have equal opportunities to participate in the political arena. Therefore, Angela and her colleagues will support the new political organization that evolves from the FARC once it is fully disarmed, by helping it to comply with legal requirements for its registration and by providing expert knowledge on the functioning of the Colombian political system. In effect, the necessary changes are already taking place. The FARC is now represented in Congress and the new opposition law has been discussed by all political parties and adopted.

Renewed hope for the future

Nevertheless, Angela is – as all Colombians – aware that the full implementation of the Peace Agreement is still a long process with many challenges, but that it is also the only way to move forward. For her, it is very special to be so closely involved in the renewal of the political system of her country. She is conscious that her work is crucial to making the system more open and inclusive, ensuring that political parties are more responsive to society, and enhancing the democratic values of (political) actors. Together, these steps will mitigate the risk of reverting to violent conflict.

For now, the signing of the Peace Agreement has already led to historically low levels of violence. From the start of the ceasefire in August 2016 until the end of that year, no more people were killed or injured in the conflict. Angela can now travel in her country much more freely, with no more fear of being attacked or kidnapped. Now, she can discover the beauty of her country as well starting to better understand the true conditions in which Colombians live in the countryside. Such developments will eventually lead to much more mutual understanding between all Colombians, and result in a more equal and inclusive society.



Afef Khnissi was born in 1982 in Nabeul, a city in the northeast of Tunisia. She is a geologist, currently pursuing her PhD in hydrogeology, and an aspiring politician. She is a member of the political party Hirak Tounes el Irada (Movement of the Tunisian Will), a small opposition party which currently has four seats in parliament. She describes herself as an ambitious person who is keen to get ahead in life. It was for this reason that Afef decided to apply for the Tunisian School of Politics in 2016.

The School was founded in 2012 by NIMD and its implementing partner, the Centre des Etudes Méditerranéennes et Internationales (CEMI). It offers a one-year training programme for young politicians. The participants are all members of one of the nine political parties which are represented in Parliament with three seats or more. They include Members of Parliament but also promising young politicians who are involved in the leadership bodies of their party. The course equips this new generation of political leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to participate in the political game, and trains them to be democrats and change-makers within their own political parties.

OUR WORK IN TUNISIA

THE TUNISIA SCHOOL OF POLITICS A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS IN TUNISIA

The Jasmin Revolution that took place in 2011 radically changed the Tunisian political landscape. Although it is often cited as one of the only success stories of the Arab Spring, Tunisia's transition to democracy after decades of authoritarian rule has not been easy. It is one thing to successfully organize elections, but cultivating an inclusive and democratic culture does not happen overnight. One of NIMD's priorities is improving the political participation of women and youth. The electoral law adopted in 2011 stipulates that there should be an equal number of men and women on election lists and that the fourth candidate on each list should be younger than 35 years old. As a result, 34% of seats in parliament are occupied by women. But still, very few women have been able to secure positions of actual power. The same is true for youth. So strengthening the position of women and youth in politics and helping them to gain access to political opportunities is a key objective of the programme.

When the Revolution took place, Afef was in university, having just started to pursue her PhD. "Most young people in Tunisia had no experience with politics until the Revolution," she explains. She and her fellow young Tunisians were born and raised in an authoritarian state. "After the Revolution it was very different." She had been socially engaged since she was a young child. But now, for the first time in her life, she was free to express herself politically and to participate in the political life of her country.

In Afef's view, that there is a gap between older and younger generations of politicians in Tunisia. Young people have a different mindset and a different way of interacting and communicating with each other. Ahmed Driss, CEMI Director, confirms this. Older politicians tend to be more content with the status quo, whereas young people are more reform-minded. This is clearly visible in political debates about, for example, educational reforms, where older politicians are much less convinced of the need for change. What is needed, says Mr. Driss, is to teach young people about democratic values and to encourage them to be optimistic about their futures. Having grown up in an authoritarian state, it is easy to be pessimistic about the prospect of having an open and transparent government, especially when progress is slow. Helping young reform-minded politicians to succeed is key to consolidating Tunisia's democratic transition.

The Tunisian School of Politics brings together young politicians from diverse backgrounds. "At the beginning it was no paradise," Afef says. Sometimes there were heated arguments between participants with different viewpoints. They struggled to get along and to accept differences of opinion. She describes how the course helped her and the other participants to understand each other better and accept differences even when they disagreed with each other. By the

end of the programme, despite their differences, they became a close-knit group. They still meet each other socially and look for opportunities to work together.

The TSoP also taught her that being an opposition politician does not mean simply rejecting everything the government does. Instead, it is about critically monitoring the government and engaging constructively by proposing alternative paths and solutions to the problems the country faces. For example, when there was an economic slowdown, the opposition proposed a national dialogue between government, opposition and civil society to address the problems. They also suggested focusing on strengthening the public administration and fighting corruption. Despite being an opposition party, they were able to contribute to resolving national problems.

One of the things Afef is passionate about is passing on the lessons she learned to others. She is involved in training and coaching men and women in her own party with the skills she acquired in the Tunisian School of Politics. In fact, this was one of the reasons she first joined the course. Currently, she is also mentoring members of her party who have just started the School. As a geologist, she is especially interested in drawing attention to environmental issues. She is also passionate about the role of women and their contribution to politics. As Ahmed Driss explains, one of the objectives of the course is to allow young politicians to become change-makers within their own parties. So the course includes topics like campaigning, party programmes and communication, which can help political parties to function more effectively. Former participants have been involved in establishing youth wings or even a political academy in their political parties, including Machrouu Tounes and Afek Tounes. In this way, the Tunisian School of Politics helps young people to become agents of change in the

political sphere.

Afef successfully completed the Tunisian School of Politics together with 35 classmates in 2016, and was one of nine participants selected to take part in an exchange visit to Finland to learn about the political system there, organized by NIMD's partner organization DEMO Finland. These nine were the best participants from each party represented in the School. This year, she is following the second level course of the Tunisian School of Politics, which helps alumni build on the skills they learned in the previous year. The participants are currently working together on an anti-corruption strategy. One of Afef's ambitions is to one day be a Member of Parliament working on environmental issues. The Tunisian School of Politics exists to help young and talented people like her to pursue such ambitions and overcome the many obstacles in their way.

Democracy is about much more than just holding elections. In order to thrive, it needs politicians that are accountable and a political culture that values cooperation rather than conflict. NIMD contributes to this by investing in a new generation of leaders and equipping them with the skills they need to practice a new brand of politics, away from the authoritarian tradition they grew up in. This is crucial in countries like Tunisia, which are in the process of a democratic transition.

